**2020 Area 29 Biennial Area Inventory**

**Summary of Findings**

**First Session:**

**Question 1. What are the service needs right now during COVID for the groups and members in Area 29?**

* Are there groups/members who are disconnected from A.A. because of COVID? What does that look like?
* What do those disconnected groups/members need to maintain their sobriety throughout this pandemic?
* Which parts of Area 29 are back to meeting largely in person, and which parts remain largely online? How do their needs differ?
* Are there services normally provided by the Intergroups that are not happening because of COVID?
* Are there services normally provided by GSO that are not happening because of COVID?

**Group 1 Findings (Presenter: Brigitte F.)**

1. Groups and members feeling disconnected. Our sense from the Districts is that a lot of them are reopening. Southern Maryland has a lot of groups that if they want to, people can meet in person. There are also hybrids, so it is not that difficult.
2. Hospitals, institutions, seniors are having a hard time, people that are in nursing homes and were used to having meetings brought in, that is not happening. It is opening a little bit, but my sense is that COVID-19 numbers are going to start going up again and the restrictions are going to come back down. Places where things are starting to open again, they may start closing down again.
3. Some groups never closed but they never made that public.
4. Baltimore Intergroup is starting a new initiative called Phone Buddies. Contact them to volunteer to call other A.A. members who have had difficulty connecting at online meetings or, if you are someone who needs a little extra support during these difficult times.
5. There are young people feeling really disconnected but some of them are starting to meet in groups outside.
6. Early Bird group is actively talking about sponsorship; they are scooping up newcomers as fast as we can after our meetings. Close. At the end of the meeting they announce, “stay on the line we’ll get you a temporary sponsor”, so a lot of us have brand new sponsees that way.
7. The Area could be sending out the DCM and GSR kits instead of waiting for the GSO to send those out.
8. Provide virtual meetings trainings for people who do not know how to do Zoom, or other virtual platforms. Would have to do In-person meetings could have a 30-minute virtual training prior to the meeting.

**Group 2 Findings (Presenter: Mary M.)**

1. Baltimore area is organizing groups in the local area and offering a virtual call, which is not a formal AA meeting but keeps the attendance low on the meeting to allow listening to one another to help with 12th step calls. They get to listen and voice their problems and it’s a mind meld on how to keep everything going and then giving them permission to continue forward in the future, teaching them how to do this on their own.
2. Younger members who need social contact are meeting in a local park area on weekends helping them to connect.
3. 12th step work is turning out to be important, how to do this, being reminded that we should not forget the Traditions.
4. That A.A. has been in difficult situations before and to keep in mind that this is a program of attraction not promotion.
5. Delivering Big Books. It can be mentioned in groups “if you need a Big Book, raise your hand and we’ll get it to you either in-person or by mail” maybe the Area can offer a program similar to this.
6. In person or Hybrid meetings with limited attendance due to social distancing should have members designated that can afford to leave the meeting just in case newcomers come in and there is an overflow.
7. Modify the meeting guide app to give an explanation on how to reach out to those with accessibilities issues. What are the issues? Are the reasons because it is technical issue, or is it something else and how to get this information out there?
8. It was mentioned that social distancing is important.
9. Noticing in their groups there is a divisiveness happening. There is a tension between hybrid and meeting in-person and the suggestion was made that the secretary make an announcement about passing out phone numbers to people or newcomers who need them.
10. Concern about the outside meetings, that Big Books and other literature are not being display or distributed, and how to get the literature out to both the newcomer and the long timer.
11. Several intergroups are making preparation for literature distributions and how to get this to the individual and maybe the Area can form an ad-hoc Committee to help with these distributions.
12. There is a caution that we in A.A. need to be careful, tread lightly, make ourselves available, and keep in mind the Traditions as we are doing our 12-step work.
13. Would like COVID specific inventory questions like the questions used today but a home group version. Use with the Tradition Inventory question. Would be a great way to have a discussion at the home group.
14. Would like to see more public and professional outreach to the professionals that work with people who would qualify now.
15. Other Areas on the Accessibilities Committee calls mentioned that they have done billboards and PSA’s.
16. Some Areas have a phone meeting that is just straight a phone meeting. We have some of those but not aware how many people are aware of them.
17. Communication, communication, communication. Feel we miss the mark at the Area by not utilizing our Committees to communicate outward. Just attaching things to monthly meetings and hoping they attend, reaches a miniscule portion of our Area. Communicating outward from the Area, not just to the Districts, but also to the GSR’s so we’re not just taking for granted that the Districts or DCMs are actually meeting because now is a powerful time to get information flowing out to people that need what we offer, what we have available, and how we can assist people, because the pandemic is going to be around awhile, that way the Area can find what its niche is because it hasn’t found it thus far.

**Group 3** **Findings** **(Presenter: Pat S.)**

1. Meetings in Southern MD are smaller, for example there is one step meeting that is 73 years old that used to have 12-15 attendees and now down to 3-4.
2. It was mentioned that meetings are dying slowly due to lack of participation.
3. Relapse is possible due to doors being closed because the social distancing limits being reached for that facility.
4. Virtual, Zoom meetings all over the world but the numbers fluctuate by area.
5. Members lost their job and lost contact with A.A. members and they are not reaching out, that was their reason for relapse.
6. There are more outside meetings growing. The weather will affect these meetings.
7. There are some people that are uncomfortable sharing on virtual meetings whereas they would have shared in an in-person meeting.
8. Elderly or member with pre-existing health conditions will most likely continue virtual meetings, whereas the younger people will want the in-person meetings.
9. New smaller meetings have grown off their regular meetings. Some pre-COVID meetings have closed.
10. There are 40-50 members attending virtual meeting, but attendance is less for in-person meetings due to space restrictions.
11. Have gained a lot of newcomers in the virtual meetings.
12. Some members are not computer savvy, so they will not attend virtual meetings and are missing out on the connection.
13. A few Districts have more in-person meetings, some virtual. Hybrid meetings will continue indefinitely.
14. Possibility for the Districts to put out a list to Area and Intergroups with 800 numbers of actual hybrid or virtual meetings and ways to login to the meetings. Help get the word out.
15. Have someone who can pass out literature.

**Open Share:**

1. Is it technology or is it something else when we are talking about the disconnect? If it is technology, we kind of have a handle on that and what we can do to fix it. Need to identify the “something else” which is critical to being able to make sure that we are reaching the people who need to hear what we have to say. How do we go about that process as an Area?
2. Stressing the importance of the 5th Tradition. In this time, we need to remind members that #1 on their list is to maintain their own sobriety and then help somebody else. In this isolation business, we can isolate ourselves so easily; if we are not reaching out and talking to at least one other person we are in trouble. Area could start a conversation telling people how we are currently maintaining sobriety through virtual meetings and other platforms; it would be another variation of a beginner’s meeting.
3. Creating something special to reach out and try and grab new people and educate them through our present means of technology.
4. The Red House Group set up a walking program five days per week and they walk over Quiet Waters Park allows you to social distance and still see member’s faces and hear their voices. Also do yard work together, which is therapeutic, and a blessing to both parties.
5. Area hosts a small focus group that concentrates on meeting weekly or biweekly. We are seeing COVID rate rising in the nation and heading into the holidays could drive increases.
6. Groups are dividing between in-person and virtual and some members are not feeling connected to their home group. Some members do not have an active home group due to COVID. How can group continue to reach out to members that they are not seeing anyone?
7. Baltimore Intergroup Outreach Committee is hosting a virtual base meeting on every Tuesday night for institutions that are not open for in-person meetings so the inmates can receive a meeting.
8. Focus on Inclusivity with meetings that are hybrids, with reasonably equal participation for members attending in-person and virtually.
9. Make sure the “Where and When” meeting guide for your District or Intergroup is informative to not only list the when or where but also what type of meeting it is as far as in-person, virtual, hybrid or suspended.
10. People are disappearing and that is a concern. Need to be willing to go to any length to protect our sobriety.

**Second Session:**

**Question 2. What can Area 29 do with its current active members to meet those needs? What resources does Area 29 currently have which could be strategically used to carry the message?**

* Grapevine/Literature/MarGenSer: in what ways might we leverage our Grapevine Inventory, Literature Inventory, and MarGenSer platform to carry the message? How many folks would need to get actively involved for that to work?
* Technology: how well is our website carrying our message during COVID? What changes might make it more helpful during this time? Are there AA resources you have searched for, but not been able to find either on Area 29’s website or other easily-accessed AA websites, that could facilitate carrying the message?
* Accessibilities: could our accessibilities work be expanded to cover those isolated by COVID, by way of a ‘loner’ or ‘remote communities’ project? In what other ways might this committee carry the message? How many folks would need to get actively involved for that to work?
* Corrections/Treatment: how well are we carrying the message into institutional facilities during the pandemic? What are some alternative methods to in-person contact? How many folks would need to get actively involved to improve our work on this front?
* In Area 29, there other committee or non-committee resources which we might use to better carry the message during this time? What are those resources?

**Group 1 Finding** **(Presenter: Nancy H.)**

1. MGS website could be more helpful and user-friendly starting with the home page,
2. Using a Loner Letter for people that do not have a group, also a way to use these letters for corrections and accessibilities.
3. The “Phone Buddy” program that the Baltimore Intergroup was using would be a good idea for other Districts.
4. Maybe the name of the MarGenSer is limiting its potential.
5. Have maps that work, that show were our Districts are and what they include.

**Group 2 Findings (Presenter: Jessica W.)**

1. Grapevine Committee has started a program to collect past issues of Grapevine books to distribute to those in need.
2. Use leftover Committee funds to donate a Grapevine subscription in print or online to a facility or to members who are loners.
3. Audio formats that may be helpful to members.
4. Literature packets from what literature we have on hand to be distributed to District and passed out to Groups to use. Lower cost items could be used to do this. The literature could be put in plastic baggie for protection when handling the literature.
5. West Central Intergroup does a “Adopt a Rack” program where 30 literature racks are place in local hospital and other facilities.
6. Do beginner’s packets for the newcomers
7. Not seeing much literature at meetings and cannot pass out at virtual meetings.
8. Some groups have a Newcomer Liaison which is a separate position, to welcome new member into the group, to get their information and share information with them including contact and helping to set up a temporary sponsor.
9. Groups that are open for in-person meeting are supplying a lot of literature to members from other groups that are meeting virtually.
10. HAIG and District 20 are sending subscriptions of the Grapevine and the LaVina to the local jail and state prison to carry the message.
11. Informal poll: How many members use the MGS website outside service to carry the message in the last month. Of the 11 members in the meeting 5 raised their hand which echoed that we would like to see an easier to use website and find information
12. The website is not always updated timely. 3 members on the Website Committee and they try to update within a day or two. May be good to have addition members on the Website Committee.
13. What is the website propose and is it meeting those needs?
14. The marylandaa.org webpage comes up on the second page of a search engine. Site is hard to find.
15. Remote communities and loaners need to know how to find us and find information to meet their needs.

**Group 3 Findings (Presenter: Shauna K.)**

1. The Area literature is currently sitting in storage, how can that be used?
2. Setting up a communication focus group by each CARC that is local specific.
3. The online version of the MarGenSer is not active and need to figure out how to get it up and running again.
4. The accessibility of the website is poor. If you Google search marylandaa.org it does not pop up.
5. There seems to be a lack of information on the website and it needs to be updated. Possibly add a banner section.
6. The use of Technology has created a multitude of new service positions and maybe we need to delineate what those positions are for newcomers to get more involved.
7. At Home Group meetings, announce at the beginning who is available to be a sponsor and possibly rename yourself at virtual meeting to indicate this.
8. Reach out to members in assisted living facilities by phone.
9. The Area possibly purchases laptops for individuals that might not otherwise be able to attend a virtual meeting.
10. Rehabs and institution are not letting member enter in-person for meeting. Have a point person to host a virtual meeting that they could attend

**Open Share:**

1. Area 29 set up a committee that works with “Loner Letter”. Maybe check with other Areas and see what they are doing.
2. Use ‘Loner Letter’ or extend the ‘Phone Buddy’ program in retirement center to make sure our seniors are taken care of since we cannot go into the retirement centers. Could possibly talk with members by phone or maybe send letters.
3. Use a structure that is already in place instead of coming up with something new. We have CARCs in place and people that are already involved in this and they are our focus groups. Members from each CARC can contact the facilities in their region instead of one person calling from one location, calling all over the state.
4. The computer idea was for the purchase by the Area for the ALS facilities not the individual and could be used by multiple users so that we can connect and if they need literature, Grapevines, etc.
5. There is an international Accessibilities meeting which included Canada, that meets bi-monthly that anyone can attend.
6. A letter for “Helping Professionals” for outreach and “Better with Age Group Flyer” were posted on chat for members’ review.
7. Used to be greeters at every home group to welcome the newcomer and explain the protocol of A.A. and see it they need any literature.
8. Monthly virtual meetings are helpful but not enough Committees or District are involved. This is a powerful resource. Gets the word out of how they can help the Districts with the services that they provide.
9. The MarGenSer could be a very important vehicle of communication if implemented right and time is invested to make the needed changes to make it more effective. Do we have the resources and interest to do this?
10. The money that was designated for the International Convention hospitably room that were not used, we could use to have a billboard and/or PSA to communicate to people who we are and that we are here as an outreach. Could be bilingual with English and Spanish.
11. There is a breakdown in communication up and down the service triangle. Host a GSR virtual meeting. We have a DCM meeting with the Delegate but why not do something with the GSRs to help teach them.
12. There is a link at aa.org that has pages of PSAs that can be downloaded and used. Check to see if you can personalize these PSAs with a local tag to add the name of your Area or intergroup and contact information. Waiting to hear back on the permission process to customize these PSAs since they are already there and paid for by the basket money.

**Third Session:**

**Question 3. What are the emotional, personal, and practical considerations, which make involvement in Area service difficult to sustain? What are some possible solutions to those issues with our existing members and resources?**

* Do we put personalities before principles? If so, how?
* Is our ‘triangle’ still upside-down? Are we taking direction from the groups/members in Area 29 as to what their current service needs are? If not, what can we do to improve that?
* Does the Area Assembly truly reflect the voice of the groups in Area 29? Why or why not?
* Does our motions process enable the Assembly to form a truly informed group conscience on the issues brought before it? Why or why not?
* Does our Area’s structure lend itself to appropriately responding to the needs of the groups/members in Area 29? Why or why not?
* Do we have too many, too few, or just enough Area Committee Meetings? Why?
* Do we have too many, too few, or just enough Area Assemblies? Why?

**Group 1 Findings:** **(Presenter: Jessica W.)**

1. Area 29 could benefit from a virtual “Recovery Meeting” for all involved in Area service and be open to other members. This would take away some mystique and help member get to know the members that are involved in service. Be a way to keep in touch during this time of isolation.Information would bedispensed from Area Service level and branch out, communicating through the Area 29 Service structure.
2. District meetings attendance dropped post COVID. Information is being announced during some home group meetings to keep members informed.
3. Spiritual principles, we need to be approachable to one another and the “Recovery Meeting” mentioned earlier could help with this.
4. Concern with the lack of involvement from the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland past Hagerstown before we went virtual and has not improved with virtual meetings. Does it work to have centralized Assembly meetings?
5. Discussed the importance of sponsoring members into service work. Being a service sponsor.
6. MGS had an active Outreach Committee that travel the Area and talked to member about Area service and what it was. The Intergroup on the eastern Shore tried this approach and rotated the times of their meeting, which helped them get more involvement. Should the Area have an Active Outreach Committee?
7. Travel time is an issue in service involvement but is not a concern with virtual meetings and attendance at Area meeting is still low.
8. Identify the Group/Districts that are inactive and interest them in carrying the message by finding a member(s) in that group that wants to be involved to give us feedback. Virtual meetings have the potential for making this more feasible.
9. Roberts Rules of Order, including the minority opinion seems to be working. Some members are hesitant to speak up or feel uncomfortable with this process.
10. There appears to be an increase in the number of groups and people in A.A. but not many members involved in service as there was in the past.
11. Learn how to use the chain of command when involved in service work. Recommend getting a service sponsor.
12. Bridging the Gap helps members get involved in A.A. without them having to navigate into A.A. themselves.
13. “CONTRA Studies” helped with learning Concepts and Traditions.
14. Cannot rely 100% on the Area, the Districts need to help to respond to some of the needs of the groups/members.
15. There is an invisible service structure that transcends the meetings themselves and we are fortunate that Area 29 is remarkably active for what people see in other areas.
16. Mentoring and encouraging members along is a very important factor and something we are very gifted to have in this Area, Service sponsorship helps to get members involved in service.
17. Some Area’s structure things differently, like having an Alternate Treasurer to fill in for the Treasurer if needed and an Officer-at-Large that could fill an opening as needed, such as filling in for the Treasurer if they are not available and there was no alternate.
18. 4 Area Committee and 5 Area Assembly meetings. The extra Assembly is to conduct the Inventory in even years and the Elections in odd years. How much business do we conduct in these meeting given all the reports that are provided and is there another way to get these needs met?
19. Should we have a weekend of service like the Mini Conference used to be done?
20. Some Areas have 2 Area Committees per year and the rest of the work is performed at the District levels. The Budget is the biggest thing that we do and the other is the CARCs recommendation, which is another layer of service.
21. If we decide to change the number of meetings we have, it would be a By-laws change and not something that the Area Chair could do. It would start at the Area Committee level and move down to the Assembly.
22. Special Event day to make things fun, to draw people in and conduct some Area business.
23. Some members cannot commit to Area service because they have life circumstances that do not allow them to attend meetings on Saturdays or the amount of time that is required to attend meetings.
24. There is a large number of past Delegates involved, that feel pushed out the door. We need to look at the best way to engage and use the Past Delegates since they have a wealth of experience and knowledge that they bring that can be of value to the Area by communicating to and educate the new service members. Possibly could have a vote to encourage them to attend the Area meetings.

**Group 2 Findings:** **(Presenter: Jeanine W.)**

1. Issue that effect Area service is the time commitment, travel involved when not virtual, sponsorship, lack of gratitude, selfishness, lack of knowledge of what the Area service structure does and lack of communication or affirmation that members are needed in the service structure.
2. Solution, the highest level that you can obtain in A.A. is the level of member. Make people aware of that. Each individual member that represents their home groups are the ones that run A.A.
3. District Newsletter to provide information to the home groups and members.
4. Workshop to provide information about service and workshops for training on service. Could do at both Area and District level and take the information to the groups.
5. Make use of our alternates if we cannot attend a meeting. Share the responsibility to take the pressure off one individual.
6. Utilize the principle of A.A., which is the idea of serving ahead of our egos. New members may feel there are clicks, at meetings. Assigned a service buddy, mentor, or service sponsor. Can be used to help you understand the process and answer any questions that they may have about the Area Assembly. Introduce them to other members.
7. If the triangle is not upside down it is due to lack of representation or participation, not due to the structure of the service. Only the groups that have a GSR present at the meeting are being represented at the Area Assembly.
8. The motions process enables the Assembly to form a truly informed group conscience on the issues brought before it based on the groups that are represented at the Area Assembly. Groups that are not represented are not part of that group conscience. To get a broader group conscience we need to get more group GRSs involved in the Area Assembly meetings.
9. The service structure does lend itself to appropriately responding to the needs of the members in Area 29. If we are not aware of the needs of the group, it could be due to the lack of communication and participation.
10. Majority of 9 people felt that we had just enough Area Committee meetings, none felt too few and one felt that we had too many.
11. Majority or 9 people felt that we had just enough Area Assembly meetings, none felt too few and one felt that we had too many.

**Group 3 Findings:** **(Presenter: Frank M.)**

1. Initially getting evolved in service at the Area level was frustrating due to lack of knowledge. Would be helpful if a welcoming letter or email was sent out when you start your new service position of GSR, DCM or Committee Chair to inform you of the importance of the position as well as the job description and responsibilities.
2. Members are in service because they love Alcoholics Anonymous and new members sometimes do not understand why we handle matters with such detail. We are doing the work of A.A. and communication and education is important, so new members understand the importance of the process.
3. We could look at these inventory questions as “first person” question. Example, do I put personalities before principles? Look at individually.
4. If the groups do not have business meeting or GSR that are not active, the service triangle is fractured and communication is not flowing.
5. People in service have negative experiences and leave Area service due to frustration. We need to stress the spiritual nature of being involved in service.
6. There are bodies of many people I know who have done service, amazing people, a lot of bodies of Area 29 and perhaps we have not been treating all our trusted servants with the respect we could and we may lose sight of that. How do we take personal responsibility so these people will want to stay, and these are personal questions?
7. Where are we in mentoring members so they stay involved in service work?
8. Educating GSRs so they can be involved in service.
9. Lots of virtual resources that could be used for promotion and marketing towards potential service members at the Area level.
10. Area 29 does create a good environment for an informed group conscience. It is careful and open.
11. Some Area Assemblies are Friday night into Saturday. Some have less Area Assemblies. Service manual states that “perhaps more than any other group people in A.A. the people in the Area Committee is responsible for the health of the Conference structure and thus growth and harmony of the A.A. fellowship”. The group’s minority opinion was to have the same amount of Area Committee meetings but less Area Assemblies.

**Open Share:**

1. We have the ability to reach out to all the Areas in North America find out what are their meeting structure and frequency to determine what are the options. Cynthia T., Delegate offered to send this request out, get feedback and to bring it back to Lori M. to present at a Committee Meeting. Lori M. is in the process of putting together a spread sheet with other Areas Committee and Assembly schedule are and what Committees they have. She is about 60 Areas in. Also looking at which Areas are more active, and which are not. It is Possible that Cynthia T. and Lori M. can work together on this project.
2. Take new members and break into small groups and put each with a Past Delegate. The Past Delegate briefly reviewed the first five Concepts and described what was going to happen that day’s business. Made you feel that they are a part of something. Need to give everyone opportunity to do something, participate. Need more training mode. We have more groups and less participation. Need to make it active to get members to attend.
3. Hard time understanding the service structure when new to Area service even though they had been sober for a while and were relatively intelligent.
4. The GSR and DCM training Schools were very helpful. And other training geared to Area 29.
5. We should be considering in our 2021 budget process the cost of having hybrid Area meeting both in-person and virtually.
6. Would like to see a loners and outreach Committee developed.
7. Members do not want to do Area service work because they state it is too political. Area service work is “The art of getting things done as a group.”
8. Survey Members that were involved in Area Service work that are no longer involved determining why. Bob C. had mentioned that he was willing to do this at the last Board of Directors meeting.
9. Due to COVID, it may be important to have more virtual meetings for either update, training or just to stay in contact with each other. Consider reducing the number of in-person meeting when COVID is over.
10. Too many meetings are not the problem. Finding out what other Areas do is not going to fix our problem. We have members that are not participating so cutting the number of meetings back is not going to change the participation. People that are not participating are not going to know that. Give members a reason for showing up. There is too much reading at the Area Meetings. We do not need the minutes read, just a summary. We do not need DCM and Committee reports that talk about what has already happened, it should be about what is going to happen.
11. Some Areas the DCM and Committee are require to send in their reports ahead of the meeting and they are printed out or currently could be send out so members can look at them ahead of time instead of being read to.
12. Put emphasis on training not just workshops. We have a wealth of experience in Area 29 that are not currently involved in service that could teach members that are coming to service all the things they need to do.
13. Continue what we are doing virtually even when we go back to in-person meeting. Provide a hybrid meeting to allow for more participation and communication to the far ends of the Area in Western MD and Eastern shore.
14. Do outreach survey to members, groups Districts that used to be involved but are no longer and do the same to those that have never been involved. Determine the problems and concerns for the members that are not involved in this inventory process.
15. All members do is talk at Area meetings the meetings are boring. Do not fully understand what MGS is doing in the meeting or to carry the message. What is the purpose? Need to educate new members.
16. Groups are becoming more isolated due to the virtual meetings because of COVID.
17. Some DCMs are good at sending out the information that they receive from the secretary to other members in their District that are not on the MGS Members email list to keep them informed.
18. Due to the elimination of information due to rotation, send an electronic invitation to new GSRs and DCMs and their alternates. This adds a personal touch. That we care, we support them and invite them to the Area Committee and Assembly meetings and provide a list of meeting dates and locations.
19. Ask how the Area can serve you as a District, a DCM, or as a GSR and provide a brief description of the Area 29 Committees that would focus on the Districts.
20. Educate the new member.