

CoDA Service Conference (CSC) 2022

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I had the great privilege to represent CoDA UK online at the CoDA Service Conference which took place in Rapid City, South Dakota, this August. It was a wonderful event and, on the whole, extremely well organised. Before I continue I wish to thank Chris and Lisa and all those involved who made it go so well.

I attended online, as did Sam, the other delegate from the UK, and Gillian, and about forty others. Another forty or so delegates attended in person. Generally this went extremely well, though there were one or difficulties, such as there were three microphones in the room at which delegates spoke but only one was on camera. I asked if they might all speak at that camera, but was told this was not possible. I do not know why. It was extremely difficult on some occasions to know who was speaking and it would have been helpful to be able to see member speaking.

There was some discussion as several delegates had not been able to download the documentation needed for the conference. I myself said I could not download it in the packages it came in, but was able to download it broken down into the original sections. I admit that I did not have the time to go through every document with a toothcomb. I am concerned that several delegates, and I suspect more than several, from what was said at conference, may not have had the opportunity to read the documentation at all.

I had intended to attend every day but was also house-sitting for friends in Hull, and had to get them to the airport, and for reasons beyond my control was unable to come to the second day, though I had intended to. I am extremely sorry about this. I had intended to stand for the Board, as there had been requests for members to do so, but did not do so because I had missed the second day. This may have been a mistake. Fortunately, a good number of members have stood for the Board. I hope to stand next year. I was much consoled when Katherine, the Chair of the Board said that she had not been able herself to get to every Board meeting and do not be deterred from offering service because you cannot get to every meeting.

I had originally intended to write a full report of the Conference, but Katherine has now sent out minutes, and I have no desire to reproduce these here. There is a full account in the minutes, to which I refer members: <https://www.codependents.org/CSC/2022/2022.htm>. In this brief report I will highlight a few high points, and one or two concerns. In particular the first day is difficult as the Board hands over its responsibilities to conference. This was extremely difficult last year, as I had not slept, and had a fearful headache. In fact, I attended every session last year, but I cannot say how grateful I was to the alternative delegate as I could not have given service responsibly. Sam, the other UK delegate this year, told me he found the whole process mind-numbing, as a vote is taken seemingly at every turn, and you can feel you are a malfunctioning political party convention, but in fact this process is necessary, to transfer authority from the Board to the Service Conference, and is probably much easier in person, and was much better handled this year than last.

Rather than go over every point I will highlight one or two points here. Four days seems a long time, but there were so many issues to discuss that there was simply not time for everything. At one point the chair of the Communication Committee brought forward a motion and Katherine asked why it had been brought to Conference. This was a valid point, but I fear it caused some embarrassment, but even this process was valuable, and reflects the desire of the Committees and delegates to serve the Fellowship in an open and transparent way.

CoDAteen

There was a very good discussion on CoDAteen. I used to be an Alateen sponsor, and made a number of points. I then received a series of messages in the chat asking why I was not on the Committee and asking me to join it. I have in fact during the last year repeatedly asked members how to join this Committee. I will come back to this below.

We voted for changes to the Preamble for CoDAteen, one really good, which I think we could incorporate into the Preamble for all groups, one if I were sponsoring a group I would want withdrawn, as it uses the term grown-ups in a way which is fine for primary school children, but not right for teenagers.

I am also concerned that whereas a teenager knows they have an alcoholic in the family, the pattern of Co-Dependency is difficult to define: some therapists say we cannot know we are Co-dependent until we are twenty-five.

At the same time the Alateen group I sponsored was of obvious value to its members, and I think a CoDAteen group would be too.

There is an issue over the ages of CoDAteen. Gillian is on the Committee and says the age is 13-19 as it is in Argentina, where the pioneering work is being done. When I was an Alateen sponsor there was a real problem when Alateens reached 21 and had to leave the group. I think each group should be autonomous and within fair boundaries choose its own age range.

Literature

The Literature Committee put forward a number of proposals. In particular we had to confirm last year's resolution to change the phrase 'men and women' in the Preamble to 'people'. This had failed first time round for technical reasons but came back as a motion at the end last year's conference, and was passed. We passed it again this year, by the required majority. I pointed out that last year the proposal had included the title the People's Preamble. This was not included, and I presume has been dropped, which is prudent. I also made the point that we wish to welcome anyone to CoDA who wants healthy and loving relationships. There are those on the spectrum who find the phrase men and women excludes them as they do not identify as either male or female. (This point was made by a Canadian delegate.) At the same time if those of the opposing view were to come to meetings, I would also want to welcome them. I know this can generate more heat than light, and for this reason I think we should not have a position on this issue, as indicated in Tradition 10, but we should do everything we can to ensure that everyone is welcome to CoDA meetings, regardless of their sexuality, their views, or their lived experience.

There was not time to discuss everything the Literature Committee wished to propose. (Timekeeping was very strict.) With seventeen minutes left of their time they told the CSC that they were preparing a book on The Inner Child, and that a member had come forward to write this book for an initial fee of \$10 000. There was considerable discussion on this point, especially as the member was to be paid to write the book. I am very concerned about this, not least as we should be open and transparent in what we do. In my youth I edited two newsletters and one magazine. If CoDA has \$10 000 to pay a member to write a book on the Inner Child, I would like the opportunity to be considered!

More importantly many members made the point that members write CoDA Literature free of charge, and asked why \$10 000 had been allocated to this. The Committee member putting forward their case told us that the Finance Committee had said they had a huge surplus and that we should spend this. This discussion could have gone on for far more time than was available. In seventeen minutes only a

few delegates could speak. I am very concerned about this, but have since been able to speak with Gillian who is on the Committee. She assures me that the \$10 000 is for editing the text, for getting it ready for the printer, not for writing it. This is a legitimate task. You can tell at once if a book has not been properly edited, but this was not what was said at Conference, and I think we should seek clarification.

Delegates also expressed concern that books and booklets were being printed in some quantity and selling in very small numbers, and that there is a not inconsiderable cost in storing literature that does not sell. Some said it might be better if literature were published online, and could be read online or printed out as needed. Others said that it is important to have printed literature available, especially for newcomers.

There was clearly not enough time for these discussions, especially for the discussion on the Book on the Inner Child.

Why members do not volunteer

We then went on to a session with the new Chair, Katherine, who in general terms did an excellent job, and is clearly communicating well with members. She asked us why members do not offer their time to give service. Each delegate in Rapid City came forward to the microphone, and gave reasons which were nearly all negative, such as laziness. This concerned me, partly because we took ninety minutes over this, and I felt the time might have been better spent on a fuller discussion of Literature, and partly because however burdensome service can be it is always beneficial. The process of giving service opens my heart to recovery. I have discussed with a number of members why they do not give service and a recurring theme was that National Service Committee is dysfunctional and/or Co-Dependent. At the time I was taken with this, and there is no doubt that we have had difficult discussions, but this is not helpful. Members would be far more willing to give service if they understood how giving service promotes your own recovery.

I should at this point record that since CSC I attended a workshop online with Chris and Lisa, who ran the conference and repeated this point. I deeply regret this, as it dampened the air at their workshop, and on reflection I disagree with what I said. It is all too easy to accuse each other, but this is gossip and criticism. It does not help the Fellowship. Instead, we should each try to work the programme, and volunteer our time and abilities as we are able. I owe Chris and Lisa an apology.

I do not think members do not volunteer out of laziness or any of the other reasons given at Conference. I think many are willing to volunteer, but do not know how to. As I have said, in the past year I have asked several times how I can volunteer to the CoDAteen Committee. Katherine has since sent out a list of Committees and their chairs. This single action may be more useful than all the discussion if enables members to put their names forward to volunteer on these Committees.

Members also have many other commitments. Since the CSC I was asked by a local secondary school, (that is a High School), to offer my services as a Governor. In the event the Bishop of the Diocese has not accepted me, but had he done so that would have taken a very great deal of time, which would have taken from the time I can give to CoDA.

When we had given our reasons why members do not volunteer Katherine proposed her solution: that a new Committee be formed to keep delegates in contact. It was pointed out that such a Committee had existed in the past and is now the Issues and Mediations Committee. I realise that there are many CoDA Committees and I do not know the roles of them all. I wondered if this should be part of the remit of the Communication Committee, though I did not get the chance to speak. Conference

approved this committee, though it was subsequently renamed a task force, and has been taken up enthusiastically by delegates, not least those from Georgia, one of whom is now chair.

I was also concerned in this debate that a number of delegates said they have been coming to conference for many years, I think in two cases seventeen and twenty-two years. In Twelve Steps we try to rotate jobs. While I have still to get to grips with how conference works, I also hope that in time I will hand over to another member. In other Fellowships, and perhaps also in CoDA, I think the main reason why members do not volunteer for service is that those already in post do not want to share the service roles and hand over, or if they do, ensure that their own proteges are elected in.

That said I very much hope the Delegate Relations Task Force, which will be to service delegates and former delegates, finds a role and is of service to CoDA

AA Big Book

There was a discussion on the AA Big Book, which some groups are using in meetings, but is not conference approved literature. We voted that only conference approved literature, and so not the AA Big Book, can be used in meetings. As far as I recall no one spoke against, and I voted in favour, but regretted my vote when the minority opinion after the vote spoke. I have discussed this with members since, who have told me that the first CoDA meetings used the AA Big Book as there was no CoDA Literature, and that the Big Book still contains much of value, and have expressed concern that it has been banned from meetings.

There clearly is a role for literature which has shaped the Fellowship, and I think we should return to this in future years. It is difficult to know where the boundaries should lie. We need to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Reports from around the world

There were reports from Mexico, Italy and Georgia:

Mexico

There are 80 groups in Mexico, across the country though much more active in some parts than others, with a number of local intergroups and a National Service Committee.

Italy

There was an interesting report, but there are fewer groups in Italy, and CoDA seems to be finding its feet there.

Georgia

There are thirteen groups in Georgia, and an active and well attended intergroup and at least three Georgia members, I think two delegates and an alternate delegate at conference, who were all very active.

Further Reflections

Last year there were online break out groups, which I was so tired I did not want to attend, so only went to two, but they were both quite wonderful and I hope we can have these in future years. It was evident that delegates meeting in person had had discussions which online delegates had not seen, especially regarding the Delegates Relations Task Force.

It was wonderful to meet if only online and in full session the delegates from SoCAL, Southern California, who have written the 30 Questions and now the 40 Questions, which are a wonderful development and learn how they came to write them. I hope they will be approved as CoDA Literature.

Future Developments

Each state of the United States can send two delegates, though not all do, and the UK and other countries can also send two delegates. But four American states send delegates from North and South, though none of them have as many groups as we have in the United Kingdom. Last year I suggested that the intergroups in the UK should be represented, and Gillian has taken this forward. If an intergroup is properly constituted it can send two delegates to CSC. The North and Regions Intergroup has recently been reconstituted and we will be looking at this possibility. It seems to me that London and South East could do the same, and even that the South East could be represented as its own intergroup based on the groups in East Kent, perhaps inviting groups in Surrey and Sussex to join them. Other regions in the UK could be represented in the same way, perhaps in time, the Southwest, and Scotland.

I think it would be a tremendous development if the UK NSC and Intergroups could be properly represented at the CoDA Service Conference, perhaps online, but also, if possible in person.

Ireland has its own intergroup, but did not send delegates to CSC. Perhaps we should liaise with them on this.

I was unable to attend the online meeting on the role of the Intergroup last year, as my phone line came down in a storm, but it seems to me that one of the primary roles should be to represent the region at CSC. I think this would also serve to focus CoDA UK on what we are doing, so that actions are taken at CSC, such as CoDA approved literature, and at a regional level, such as promoting the Noddfa retreat or dealing with problems in local groups.

CoDA UK would still have a very definite role, such as helping to found new groups and maintaining the website, and representing the UK as a whole.

I want to strongly encourage members to serve the Fellowship by serving on the Committees, especially as this can now be done online, so time zones permitting UK members can serve on Committees meeting in the States. Perhaps, for example, members of Intergroups, including the Literature representatives, could serve on the Literature Committee, though all members could consider this role, as one of the main functions of the Literature Committee is to submit Literature to Conference for approval.

In this context I would want the whole membership of CoDA to be involved in the book on the Inner Child. Since conference a member shown me a pamphlet on the Inner Child that he is drafting. Would it be possible to work with him to expand what he has written with a view to developing it as a book on the Inner Child? This would seem to me a far better use of CoDA funds than what was proposed at Conference.

Next year CSC will be based in Houston, Texas, both in person and online, as this year.

I very much hope that in future years we will be able to host the Service Conference in the UK, and I hope that both NSC and the Intergroups will look at possibilities as to how we might do this. It would be wonderful if UK members could both represent the UK and serve CoDA by hosting Conference.

Katherine asked why members do not volunteer. When we serve CoDA we recover. For this reason alone I hope that UK members will volunteer to serve as delegates, and alternative delegates, so sharing the role, and to serve on CoDA Committees.

I also hope that UK member will service the Conference as Shaf did last year, and serve on Committees as Gillian did this year and last.

In Summary and Conclusions

The Conference went extremely well, and I want to thank Katherine, Chris, Lisa and all those who made it possible.

By far the most important consideration is how the UK is represented, as outlined above. Should we consider that the UK should be represented at CSC by the Intergroups, and how can we encourage UK members to serve CoDA at world level, at CSC and especially on the various committees and the Delegate Relations Task Force.

As has been said from the very beginning of the Twelve Step programme: From Service to Recovery.