

CoDA Service Conference

Conference Delegate Report

Conference in Ottawa, Canada, 2021

I represented the UK National Service Committee at the CoDA Service Conference in Ottawa, online this summer, with Pete H also as delegate, and Cammie A as alternate delegate.

The Conference was extremely hard work, and also extremely successful. I do not propose to outline every action minute by minute, as the minutes are available, or at least they will be, but simply to highlight a few points, express one or two concerns, and make one or two recommendations for future years.

It was extremely well run, very well chaired, and proper measures were taken to ensure that only those members who had been properly elected were able to vote and that each meeting was quorate. There were a number of social meetings after the sessions, which finished at 10 pm UK time. I attended only two of these as I was tired out by it all, but had I known how good they would be I would have attended them every night. They were a great opportunity to meet other members informally. As there were 42 delegates, and more alternate delegates, and over ninety people altogether including those enabling the conference to take place, and as only one person could speak at a time in the sessions, this was more valuable than I could have realised. I was deeply impressed with maturity and well-balanced sensitivity of those members I met in these sessions. I also discovered that several delegates and those enabling the conference were partners and both on the same screen in the "get to meet you" social sessions.

I also attended a fun, social meeting of the finance committee, with a light-hearted quiz. The aim of this meeting was to explain to members that members of the finance committee need not be qualified accountants, in fact none of them are, but they do need to be CoDA members who have some recovery and are able to take responsibility for ensuring that CoDA is well run, and that the money is well looked after and cared for.

The first day was mainly procedural motions, and mind-numbingly boring, but things got much better after on the following days. I had received an extremely unpleasant lawyer's letter the previous day, and not slept, so I handed the baton to Cammie, and she did sterling work, with motions asserting that we needed twenty-eight members to be quorate, that they had to be counted individually each session, and so on. On the following days we got down to the real business and the conference became easier.

My internet was weak, and I got messages to this effect. The baton has to be passed while the delegate is present. I messaged Chris. He agreed that if my internet failed the baton would be deemed to have been passed to Cammie, so long as she had attended the whole of that session.

Cammie did absolutely wonderful work, and was an amazing alternate delegate, and I want to record my thanks to her. I messaged her about motions, to ensure we were agreed – we always were in agreement when I asked her, though she often, indeed always, had valuable insights. I found her encouragement and support incredibly helpful.

When CSC meets in person I understand that there are not alternate delegates. I want to record how helpful I found it to have Cammie with me. Some delegates missed sessions and appointed alternate delegates for childcare and I picked up my lodger form work, though I would now ask him to get a taxi as the sessions are so important to the well-being of CoDA. I think alternate delegates are all but essential in online sessions, not least because the internet might fail, but more importantly having alternate delegates means that the burden of decision making can be shared, and so the membership is better represented.

There were all sorts of linguistic usages I had to get used to. If a motion was tabled, it was tabled in the American sense, not in the British sense. The chair asked the proposers if they were willing to accept crafting which often in effect meant taking amendments which were often proposed to tidy up a motion, or make it easier to understand rather than to change it entirely.

I do not wish to record every session here as the conference has been minuted, but will highlight one or two sessions. Members will be aware that many groups have been saying people instead of men and women in the preamble. There was a motion for this change along with three others tidying up the language and avoiding repetition. It seemed that this would pass, but the final speaker said that she found one of the changes, regarding healthy and loving relationships, unhelpful, as she used this term with her sponsees, and wanted to continue to use it. In the event the motion failed, to the very great disappointment of those who are not gender binary.

At the end of the conference the Arizona delegate came back with a motion to change the words “men and women” in the Preamble to “people”, though it was a little more complicated than this as it involved retitling the Preamble the People’s Preamble, and the motion quoted both the new and old preambles in full, but with slight changes in punctuation which were in fact misprints and had to be tidied up. It took half an hour to propose the motion and so there was no time for discussion. I voted for it and am glad to say it passed.

I should also record that I gave a thirty second response when the motion was first debated as I was abused in childhood. I would be happy to tell the Committee in person what I said, but would prefer it was not recorded, or if recorded, recorded as tactfully as it was at the CSC.

I very much want welcome non-binary members, but at the same time CoDA is for anyone who wants healthy and loving relationships. I am writing this in the week that Kathleen Stock has resigned as Professor of Philosophy at Sussex University. I also want to welcome those who consider that there are only two genders. As far as CoDA is concerned, this should be an outside issue. We should welcome people whatever their opinion. We need to stick firmly to Tradition 10, and that only in this way can we welcome all people, whatever their views.

I am also concerned that the People's Preamble sounds like the People's Republic of China. I understand why it was brought in, and that technically we have voted on it. I hope that this title will be quietly dropped, or perhaps better, that next year we will vote again and formally revert to the title Preamble.

We also voted to add all forms of social media to Tradition 11. We are using more than one version of this revision in the groups I attend, so I will have to check the minutes as to the exact wording we voted on.

I am concerned that in the discussion it was said that this not extend to Facebook, as it was claimed Facebook is a private medium. This depends on the settings the FB user has chosen. I tried to make this point, but did not express myself well. People have used FB not realising that they are posting in public, and CoDA, in my view needs to express extreme caution with social media. "Who you see here, what you hear here, let it stay here." It would be all too easy for an identifiable share to be posted on Facebook without the person realising that they were breaching confidences. This issue is of critical importance to CoDA and to our keeping CoDA safe. I would like to look at this again next year at CSC.

Members will all know the phrase "Conference Approved Literature". Never in my wildest dreams in Twelve Step work have I imagine that I might actually be at conference approving literature. The fundamental documents, the Step, the Traditions, the Promises, the Preamble and the Welcome are perhaps even more important, but it gave me a tingle in my spine to realise that we were approving literature for use by members, in recovery, working the programme, individually, with their sponsors, in workshops, and in Twelve step groups. I fear did not even think of passing the baton to enable Cammie to share this privilege, though I should have done. We approved a booklet on the concepts, the page on the similarities and the differences, and prayers that the Literature Committee presented to us. I spoke about how we had used the sheet on the differences in Penmaenmawr, which allayed many fears I think may have even swung the vote. There was some controversy over the language used in the prayers, and afterwards one person expressed reservations that they were too religious. However, they were used by Ken and Mary, the founders, at our thirty fifth birthday celebrations, and I think went down well. For this reason alone, I am very glad we approved them.

I mentioned above the joy of meeting other members after the sessions I only did this twice, once during the conference and once at the end. There are two or three points I wish to raise in addition to the points I have made in this report.

First, the on-line meeting was extremely successful. I would love to attend face to face, but realise this is impractical. I hope to attend next year's meeting in Rapid City online, if I am elected to do so.

Second, the UK only had two delegates, whereas America had two per state, though not all states were represented, and four for California, Arizona and one other, in each case as North and South. Could we at least look at having the North and South represented separately, and possibly any other intergroup that is formed, and having North and South, and perhaps any other Intergroup represented at CSC.

Third in the final meeting after the conference the delegates and their partners were asking where to meet next time, which would be three years after Rapid City if we do not meet in person for that period. I suggested meeting in Britain, saying how successful the visit of Ken and Mary had been. This was greeted with alacrity by every single person present on screen, and the American and Canadians would love it. I think we should take this suggestion seriously, and think about where to meet, London, Bournemouth, Liverpool, Noddfa, perhaps Llandudno, or somewhere else. Could we meet in London, and then have a retreat for those that wish in Noddfa? At the moment this is just a suggestion, but I think it would put CoDA UK on the map if we were to host the CSC, and it would be a valuable service that would help us to grow and strengthen our Fellowship.

Thank you to all those who helped make the CSC possible, and to those who assisted in every way, Shaf, who was on the events Committee, Gillian was on the Literature and other Committees, Pete who was the other delegate, and especial thanks to Cammie for her help and support. And very great thanks to those who elected me to attend. Thank you all.

Philip

6th November 2021