

Youth in OA e-Newsletter First Quarter 2007

The "Youth in OA" (YIOA) Committee will try to generate a quarterly e-Newsletter for the OA community interested in helping youth in OA. At its formation, this BOT committee was chartered to target 18-25 year olds. WSO has started a file of related documents the WSO and the Committee members use to respond to WSO inquiries.

Contact with OA members who have been active with youth (teen and pre-teen) has reinforced the positive view of the pamphlet *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous: A Kid's View* held by the YIOA Committee. One couple used the book in discussions with their grandchildren and at pre-teen and teen OA meetings. They also reported using it for adult OA meetings with good results. They reported that when they left their region, the youth OA efforts waned. It stresses for the Committee the importance of committed adults. A one-year commitment is recommended. In a future e-newsletter I hope we will get more of their positive story.

St. Louis Youth OA meeting

We have been hearing a good deal about youth in OA activities in St. Louis. Sarah G., of the Region Eight Young People's Committee was able to get in touch with Peggy E. from St. Louis. The youth meeting has been going for 6 years and still operates. It started in November 2000.

The meeting is very informal, no shaming or blaming. The meeting has a few young people and some older people. There is one person who has been coming to this meeting since she was 12 ... she is 16 now. She has brought friends but generally they do not keep coming back. Occasionally others have brought friends. Not much socializing outside of the OA meeting.

This meeting started with speakers from their intergroup. Now the meeting varies with the first week being a Step, the middle two meetings the group's choice, and the last meeting a Tradition. The young people distribute flyers on the college campus. They meet in a hospital. Transportation and young people leaving for college are issues. A young person left for the University of Missouri and started an OA meeting there. Although there have been some young people in their teens, most of them are in their 20s. The local intergroup initially generated interest in starting a young people's meeting and publicized it.

As a result of the YIOA members' activities at assemblies, we have 105 emails of OA members who have strong interest in youth in OA activities. This e-newsletter is our first attempt at using the list - blind copy.

Web site (www.oa.org) youth page is still a work in progress.

Charles A.
YIOA Committee Chair

Youth in OA e-Newsletter Second Quarter 2007

This is the 2nd "Youth in OA" (YIOA) Committee quarterly e-Newsletter for the OA community interested in helping youth in OA. YIOA currently sees its role as networking facilitator for OA members around the world interested in helping youth in OA.

Sid and Jerry B.

These OA members have worked with youth in OA for about 15 years. Originally they were in Region Six, but now they are in Region Eight. Some of their experiences were summarized in the YIOA 1stqtr2007 e-Newsletter. The YIOA Committee asked for more details and summarize them here.

The ages of the children at these OA meetings were between 8 and 16. An adult accompanied each child. The children sat on an inner circle and the adults behind. They had a guest speaker each week. Most were under 25, but many were older. The older speakers focused on the younger portion of their lives, so the young people could identify.

At the end of the speaker portion, they read the Step of the month from "OA 12 & 12: A Kid's View" and opened it up for sharing. (Anyone interested in reaching out to youth in OA is encouraged to get a copy or three of "OA 12 & 12: A Kid's View" as a reference.) Usually this finished the rest of the meeting. If there was time left, the meeting was opened up for general sharing. Other than the speaker, none of the adults were allowed to share until all the young people had an opportunity to share. The meeting went on for three years. At least three of the seven or eight children who regularly attended this meeting are still in OA. One works in an addiction clinic and another is in high school.

Feel free to send any questions you may have about their experiences to either Sid or Jerry. If you want more details or have questions, contact youthinfo@oa.org. Sid and Jerry have also been added to the contact list sent to OA members inquiring about youth in OA to WSO. Lee Redman, Member Services Manager, is supporting the YIOA Board of Trustees Committee and responds to inquiries about youth in OA.

Los Angeles Intergroup - Jennifer S.

Jennifer is the Young People's chairperson for the Los Angeles Intergroup. Prior to her tenure as committee chair, the experience with youth in OA meetings did not last long. She wanted to plant OA seeds. She decided to start a young people's newcomer meeting. The meeting welcomes parents/caregivers/friends/teachers to attend as well. There is a speaker for 5-7 minutes, and an opportunity for everyone to ask the speaker questions. Literature is available for purchase, and they have newcomer packets and meeting lists. The meeting is only 25 minutes long, and everyone is welcome to stay for the anorexic/bulimic emphasis OA meeting called "Willing to Stay," held in the same room, immediately afterwards.

Jennifer wrote: "We do not expect the meeting to be large. In fact, if one newcomer attends, we are thrilled. If not, we always have each other. There are always a few other OA members who attend, and I always

try to find speakers who are youthful and have ample recovery to share."

If you want more details or have questions, contact youthinfo@oa.org. We are all in this together!

As a result of the YIOA member's activities, we have 105 emails of OA members who have strong interest in youth in OA activities. The YIOA Committee is preparing an ad to be published in Lifeline seeking OA members with interest in youth in OA issues. Web site (www.oa.org) youth page is still a work in progress.

Charles A.
YIOA Committee Chair
2007-2008

Youth in OA e-Newsletter Third Quarter 2007

This is the 3rd "Youth in OA" (YIOA) Committee quarterly e-Newsletter for those in the OA community interested in helping youth in OA. YIOA currently sees its role as networking facilitator for OA members around the world interested in helping youth in OA.

The YIOA Committee is currently a Board of Trustees (BOT) Committee with four trustee members. The committee is working on a set of questions to be sent to OA members who have expressed an interest in youth in OA outreach. The question set will be sent to those on the e-Newsletter list and to those who respond to the ad to be published in Lifeline seeking OA members with interest in youth in OA issues. Web site (www.aa.org) youth page is still a work in progress and will have "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous: A Kid's View" available.

The following is a report of an experience with high school aged youth. If you have questions for Omaha, Nebraska, please forward them to me and I will pass them on to the individual.

Omaha Nebraska:

The youth meeting in Omaha, Nebraska was at a large high school. The idea came from a school counselor who attended an OA meeting. She expressed an interest in having a meeting for her students. An OA member put her in touch with people from the intergroup. One individual took this on as a project. Having an OA member who feels strongly about reaching out to youth seems to be important to such efforts.

A meeting was established that would take place during one school period and then rotate to the next period the following week, and so on. This way students would not miss the same class each week. They needed to obtain a pass from the counseling office to attend. Sometimes they got the pass after the fact. This way it was easy to attend. The teachers and students of the classes they missed only had to know they had an appointment in the counseling office. It is encouraging that there was such a degree of cooperation between OA and the school counselor.

One challenge was that each period was less than the standard hour. They were 45-50 minutes. There was one period around the noon hour that was closer to 90 minutes. The third year of the meeting the school changed the periods and they were even shorter. The format of the meeting was the suggested OA format for youth meetings. We did all the readings. The counselor attended all meetings. She did some administrative things like attendance. All attendees, including adults, had to sign in with full name.

The counselor had attended an OA meeting or two outside the school, but was not really a participating OA member. She said she was required to be present during the meetings. She also would sometimes provide cross talk and directly ask students questions. Some of the adults were not comfortable with this as it went against normal OA meeting formats. The counselor also said she was required by law to take action if certain things were divulged, such as abuse.

The OA member who helped set up the meeting attended every week and set the topics. Attendance was usually from about seven to 20 students. At the end of the first year she started a meeting at a church one block away so the kids could continue on with meetings during the summer. There was almost no attendance at this meeting at the church, maybe one student at one meeting. This meeting folded.

As the editor of the YIOA e-newsletter, I have modified some of the report to this point. The rest is less changed and I have put it in quotes to indicate the writer is directly giving his experience, strength and hope with respect to this critical area of youth in OA. Any observations I make will be in brackets.

"Shortly after the start of the second year of the meeting at the school the OA member that facilitated was no longer able to attend. The counselor called me because I had attended a few of the meetings. She didn't know what to do. She was not close enough to OA to facilitate the meetings. Her role was as school counselor. I agreed to take over facilitating the meeting. I did this for the rest of that school year plus the next.

"I tried everything for meeting topics. Reading from the Big Book was not successful. The kids did not seem to relate and wouldn't share. Most other reading was the same. The one slight exception was the stories in the Brown Book.

"I tried to focus on the Steps. The kids had trouble relating to these as well so I stuck mostly with Step One. It was a struggle to present the program in a way that the kids could relate to. I also had other adult members attend and share their stories. This was usually received well. The kids would relate to things they heard and would share openly. It seems that the area that resonated most with them was self-esteem.

"The most successful meeting as far as open participation of the students was when an adult member who was also an artist shared his story by showing pictures he had drawn at different times of his life. Then he invited them to draw pictures of themselves and talk about it. This sparked deep sharing by all. It also crossed over the food issues and related emotional and spiritual issues we normally try to stay close to. This ended up more as a general self-esteem topic. But this is where the kids were, and what they could relate to.

"At each meeting the adults stressed that they were available as sponsors. We talked about sponsorship and all the tools. The biggest challenge to the meeting was the lack of motivation of the kids to make calls, get sponsors, attend meetings outside the normal school hours, and often even the motivation to read a short passage of something that was being passed around the circle. I was not able to hit on the right ways to motivate. I have been used to the concept that OA is for the willing. People do what they need to do.

"The adults offered to pick students up to take them to outside meetings and events. This was rarely taken advantage of. I do remember a dance and a Super Saturday [an extended meeting in Region Four with

several OA speakers] that were attended. The kids were able to get into the fun aspect and participate that way on occasion.

"In spite of that, I had a sense that there was a strong need for OA in their lives and that they wanted it to succeed. There was regular attendance of the school meeting by many students. Perhaps with the right facilitator it would have lasted longer. The counselor was well tuned into the needs of the students and this is the reason the meeting ever came about. But she needed outside help to facilitate the meeting.

"After two years I decided my schedule wouldn't allow me to continue as facilitator. Also it was not something I ever saw myself doing. Relating to high school age kids is not my strong point. I think this is an important thing. I took it on because I didn't want to see it end. Many of the adults who came and shared did relate well with the kids, so I ended up more in a role of being the person who got someone else to be there to lead the topic. After I ended my involvement no one else was able to commit to coordinating the meeting, so it ended. I was told that there had been an Al-Anon meeting at the school that lasted five years and ended when that facilitator was unable to continue."

This report out of Omaha is packed with experience, strength and hope. Again, the importance of committed adults is demonstrated in the outreach for youth. If anyone has questions for the writer of the report please email me or any other member of the Youth in OA Committee copied on this email. If you have experience with youth in OA to share with other OA members please forward it to me.

Charles A.
YIOA Committee Chair
2007-2008

Youth in OA e-Newsletter Fourth Quarter 2007

This is the 4th "Youth in OA" (YIOA) Committee quarterly e-Newsletter for those in the OA community interested in helping youth in OA. YIOA currently sees its role as networking facilitator for OA members around the world interested in helping youth in OA.

The YIOA Committee is currently a Board of Trustees (BOT) Committee with three trustee members. The Committee has completed a set of questions to be sent to OA members who respond to a Youth in OA ad in Lifeline. The question set will also be sent to those on the e-newsletter list. Web site (www.oa.org) youth page is still a work in progress. One of the items slowing things down is the name of the page. Would teens and young adults be turned off by a page titled "Youth in OA?"

The booklet *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous: A Kid's View* is now available to read or download at http://www.oa.org/pdf/A_Kids_View.pdf. The illustrations are geared to the very young, but the text can be helpful for a wider age range. "Billy's Story" is also available at http://www.oa.org/pdf/Billy_story.pdf. This piece of literature is for the very young.

The following note contains some information that could help adult OA members in relating to youth who may attend OA meetings.

**From: Nikki S.
Ontario Canada, Essex County IG
A former youth in OA at WSBC**

Charles,

I heard about OA when I was 13 years old from a member of AA whom I babysat for. He had his literature lying around and I read it after the kids went to sleep. When he came home he would talk program and share his experience, strength and hope. He informed me of OA meetings and I attended a few. The seed was planted for me at that time. I did not continue because everyone was my parents' age and treated me like their child. And not in a good way. They didn't take me seriously and treated me differently. I didn't belong to "their" group. But I did know I belonged to OA. I came back at age 16 and found the same issues. I left again. I returned at age 19 and 289 lbs. I stayed for 9 months and lost 90 lbs. Personalities in the group still pointed out my lack of life experiences: in school, no children, no boyfriend, living with my mother. I left because I felt I didn't belong.

Now I am 33 years old, married, and have two children; and when I came back 16 months ago I was 460 lbs. I am now 338 lbs. Things are different now. But how unfortunate I felt so unwelcome 20 years ago. This is my story but maybe you can take my experience and apply it to your service work to get the word out to the youths.

Please contact me if you have any more questions.

The good news is that Nikki continued to come back to OA. She says, "The seed was planted for me at that time." That may be the best we can do for youth who find their way to the OA rooms - plant a seed that may grow and flourish.

If anyone has questions please email me or any other member of the Youth in OA Committee copied on this email. If you have experience with youth in OA to share with other OA members please forward it to Charles A. at trustee@oaregion8.org.

YIOA Committee
2007-2008