

Discussion Notes from Breakout rooms

Area 83 Round Tables – June 16, 2020

Discussion Questions

What obstacles could prevent a member from attending a virtual meeting?

Sample Answers might include:

- Can't hear (hard of hearing)
- No internet
- No long distance plan
- No smartphone
- Not tech savvy
- Fearful of technology
- Can't see (sight impaired or blind)
- Member don't know about zoom meetings
- Don't have contact information to invite members to join a meeting
- People who had a bad experience and won't come back to zoom
- Others?

What strategies could be used to get around each obstacle?

How do we identify those in our community who are facing any of these obstacles?

How do we reach out to help them get around the obstacle?

Breakout Room 1

What obstacles could prevent a member from attending a virtual meeting?

Telling members we are digging in for the long haul
quality of fellowship is the largest barrier for a group
fear of the process
ok to have camera on
ok to have mic on
when in a group setting, with people you do not know
which meant that being with their own group was warm and fuzzy
do not know how to get people to understand joining this, what is anticipated, as
a long haul situation
bombing is an excuse sometimes, just do not like, but how to know if you do not
try, but how to get over fear
age does not seem to be a hindrance
fear seems the predominant
if you can facebook you can zoom
encourage
forget gossip

What strategies could be used to get around each obstacle?

Small knit community, we contacted all our members and put out emails with invites to zoom meetings and divvied up missing members and tried to call or contact each of them.

larger home group with business meetings, included in their business meeting agenda to reach out and offer help and assistance.

ask in the 'chat function' if want contact, put in their email address.

keep in our opening remarks, that we are offering all we can to help.

one thing to remember, if we are not seeing people in our zoom meetings, pick up the phone

and check in with them.

if possible help alleviate fear of being on zoom.

let them know there are other types of meetings not just speaker and discussion, there are many other types and zoom.

communication is so vital.

we need to communicate – and how to let people know that we are here and on zoom.

intergroup in one municipality formed an ad-hoc committee to answer COVID and AA questions.

we have asked for email addresses so we can keep in contact .

How do we identify those in our community who are facing any of these obstacles?

How do we reach out to help them get around the obstacle?

Key to let people know that we are here.

To not feed into the 'feeling' that holding out until we meet again in person is warranted, we do not want to delay in joining on zoom, help people get there, since we do not want to feel pressure to rejoin in person too early.

We do not have even stop zoom, we may just want to keep some of them going.

Find balance between safety and being there for the newcommer (protect zoom meetings from bombing).

some meetings are growing in size (but decrease in hg members; but increase in visitors).

some safety measures:

closing meeting after a few minutes

not share meeting log in

and a bunch of stuff I missed: mainly, that fear is the number one obstacle, we did not discuss ability and disability issues, except to say that there are some resouces at aa.org and nyintergroup

and a bit on how to 'safely' run zoom, which was not really on topic but helped again, with fear

Breakout Room 2

For seniors living alone, who are not interested/reluctant/incapable of learning new technology, we could go to them, Visit in person following social distance rules. Have scheduled meetings with them, Identify a few people and set up a schedule. The human contact is the most important aspect.

For nursing homes, retirement, 12 step calls outside. Set up A number of people to take different days and do these calls in person.

For seniors who are interested, provide one on one basic training on what is needed. This includes ensuring voice and video on in set up, mute, unmute, chat, rename, and raising hand. Set up specific zoom training times. Both parties have a phone handy to provide additional aid. Note that depending on what they login on (Samsung products or apple, Smart phones, tablets, laptops or desktops, where they find these things will vary.

For patients in the hospital provide The staff with a list of the local zoom meetings. Instructions on downloading zoom, and using the invitation to join a meeting Staff assists or sets up the zoom meeting for the inpatient.

Expense issues, access issues. Could Attach the senior to your plan/services, ie tablet. Cost \$10 month. Recommended using messenger to do face-to-face, easier For the senior, and can have three or four people on at the same time. If senior capable, one on one zoom training.

In Spanish meetings, DCM provides meeting info. Set up physical meetings using social

distancing Max five people. Requirement then for more physical meetings to accommodate all participants But successful in meeting needs for contact.

Rehabs. Sullivan house, and Homewood are using zoom and having two different groups hanging out. Recommend talk to Julie she has information on this. They are reaching out and finding their own meetings.

Reach out to the elderly. It's good weather now social distance more workable. All of us have books.

Every group more than likely has a meeting list. And usually only a few people have access to that meeting list. Some of the meeting list may be in locked buildings but should be accessible soon. Use the meeting list phone numbers to get emails. This will cover off the members, but perhaps not the newcomer. Using that list ask the members to reach out to those they know of, example any newcomers, sponsees etc.

Have more newcomer meetings. Will feel less intimidating. And if the meetings We have on the website do you have a breakout room for newcomers show that front and centre so that newcomers are aware when they're looking for a meeting

Can we "advertise". Would newspaper or tv cover off the story of AA reaching out to people via zoom. Washington post Recently had an article about this. This could be the Canadian view.

211 is ontario number To call if you're in need of mental health assistance/support. They are on call 24/7, do not ask for names. It has AA intergroup addresses in it so if someone calls about alcoholism they would be given that information. In addition, although intergroup office is shut down, they are providing call services that people are answering from their homes.

Within the meetings, (group determines) members who are willing provide Their phone numbers, to newcomers in crisis.

Breakout Room 3

- Fear of technology, afraid of Zoom.
- Educate the member to share that the platform is a safe way of communication and attending meetings.
- Afraid of identity theft.
- Members feel very vulnerable.
- Fear of Zoom bombing.
- Afraid of passwords being stolen.
- Have members who are active in service reach out to members i.e. GSR's reach out to their respective group members.
- Invite them to attend a Zoom meeting.
- Create a zoom account and get them to join one on one – share with them the benefits of the technology. If not wanting to join via a computer, discuss joining via a phone.
- Some members just do not want to join.
- Sometimes literacy and ESL present challenges – particularly groups in the Toronto area.
- Fear of entering a virtual setting.
- Hiccups in a Zoom meeting – members hard of hearing will leave the meeting due to speaking becomes garbled due to a blip in the connection of the zoom meeting. Internet connection is weak.
- Responsibility falls on members to reach out to members.

- Not all groups have a zoom account.
- **NEWCOMERS** – How does the newcomer find meetings on Zoom?
 - Identify the newcomer.
 - Have a member talk to the newcomer one on one after the meeting.
 - Share phone numbers of current members with the newcomer.
- **WORKSHOPS** – Have workshops to educate people on how to use Zoom.
- Area 83 website provide tips and tricks on Zoom.

Breakout Room 4

What obstacles could prevent a member from attending a virtual meeting?

Zoom isn't free for everyone

- The zoom meetings, it is possible to dial in by phone. Depending on the phone number, there can be a charge on the call.
- I have heard that many of the data plans (for phones and home internet) were set to unlimited during the pandemic, and this likely will be ending soon as the lock down eases
- Data plans on phones, and there are some that have limited internet plans at home.
- Calls may be long distance: I could not find an Ottawa number to dial into when I searched the provided link. A 613 number was not available.
 - Can we look into this from the technical side and how charges apply and communicate to the membership?
 - Consider alternative Zoom plans, if the business plan provides more free dial in numbers.

Anonymity:

My group, has only 7-8 members signing on. We have a lot more members in our group, but no one wants to give out their email.

- I try to contact the long timers once a week, to let them know that we haven't forgot them.

No way to communicate the meeting details:

We have no way to reach some members. We don't always have up-to-date membership lists, or the numbers we have are out of date. We have a lot of members who don't have sponsors, they aren't members of a group and they don't have a way to find access to online meetings.

I am from a small group, and possibly 2 of us have access to computer. Members of my group use computers at the library to do their AA service work and receive AA communications. Therefore, these folks aren't checking emails now, and do not have the ability to log in to a meeting.

Don't know if the Intergroups are posting these meetings online.

- GTA Intergroup, there are a lot of resources posted. Some documents on our website might be helpful to others for modeling on other websites. AAtoronto.org
- Ottawa Intergroup, there is a service login. With the login details you can gain access to the meeting details.
- In Oshawa Intergroup: Intergroup phone service is working. People are finding online the phone number, calling to whoever is on the phone and in the last 6 weeks, we have had 5-6 new people.
- The Ottawa phones have someone answering them about 85% of the time between 10am-10pm. Anyone who has the shift, can get the meeting passwords that are not available online.

Making meeting details available, without compromising meeting safety

- Trade off between having such a secure system for accessing meeting details, vs posting meeting details online, and then having to scrutinize those coming to the meeting and risk getting zoom bombed.
- We have the waiting room, with two people watching it for nefarious attendees (OttawaAA.org)
- We have an email address that if someone wants a meeting password, they can send the

email to get it. Add an extra layer of security.

- o We have a message in the waiting room that says if you don't get let in, text this phone number (and you have to talk to Mike B).

Long timers don't feel that they are being missed

- o I call regularly, one of our long timers to check on them, and to let them know they are missed. They felt their sobriety is not in jeopardy, but I remind them how important they are to my sobriety!
- o I took our meeting list and started calling people. Some said they weren't interested. Some of the others, we went to their house or called them and walked them through the zoom set up.
- o Now that things are opening up a little, I would be willing to bring my computer to a location with Wifi, and invite those who have not been attending to partake in a meeting

Visually impaired are surely challenged to enter passwords or get meeting details.

For a visually impaired person, they can call someone and hear over the speaker the meeting that is taking place online.

On the upside, we are getting a lot of newcomers.

Challenges moving forward:

Some will never embrace it because they don't like the ability to interpret body language.

We are concerned that newcomers will fall off when we return to face to face meetings. We need to keep some blend of online and in person meetings.

How do we identify those in our community who are facing any of these obstacles?

Take a moment at the end of the business meeting and ask who hasn't been seen in the rooms lately.

Some other suggestions that didn't really fit under the obstacle subheadings.

A top down message, from Area, trying to reach everyone online, that if you know someone who is not tech savvy, if you know these obstacles exist for someone you know that this is the time that the hand of AA be there. Perhaps if every member could find one techno-challenged person, to call them once a week. Reach every member we can reach.

Normally at the end of our business meeting we ask "who haven't we seen for a while". That could be a regular agenda item at a business meeting.

Other than telephone, the GTA intergroup is looking at putting in Help Chat. We tested it, and the response was overwhelming. This is Software, that is client server based, and everyone logs in and chats.

Breakout Room 5

We discussed the following:

We agreed the same hurdles given in the meeting such as lack of internet for the members, unfamiliarity with zoom etc.

- We came to united conclusion of the lack of interest from the members meeting via zoom
- Some members are getting together in small groups to they can talk about their experiences
- Some are communicating using Whatsapp

How can we help them?

- Open a Zoom account of not done yet
- Call the members that don't have internet

and let them know that they can just call in and participate just using the phone.

- Meet via zoom with all the GSR's of the district and meet with them once a month
- Start opening the groups having the limit of members allowed according to the government's instructions

These were the points the group came up with.

Breakout Room 6

Minutes of breakout group discussion; Chair and Secretary for "Room 6": Alex W. (Southside Group, Winnipeg, Area 80)

- We acknowledged the usefulness of Tim F.'s presentation on "who is being left out", where we recognize many varieties of barriers, be they **technological** (computers, bandwidth, smart phone data), **practical** (logging in, passwords, inexperience with Zoom), **physical** (access, hearing, sight), or **personal** (anonymity breaching, zoom bombing, other negative experiences).

- This said, we also noted that Zoom had worked admirably well as far as substituting for in-person meetings during COVID-19, with many among us actually preferring Zoom to in-person meetings for several reasons. Our respective groups also seem to contain members who prefer Zoom. Reasons given include: less travel to and from meetings, joining meetings with friends in other areas, join meetings we usually wouldn't attend and simply listening (or reporting back to home groups, as is my case tonight), and attending meetings in different languages for those whom English is not the native tongue. German and French were given as examples.

- But the problem here is that our break-out room, and indeed all attendees tonight, are among those who are comfortable with Zoom and thus outside the target group of this very discussion! We are preaching to the converted and thus inherently biased in our "pro-Zoom" views. We need to remember that many are missing meetings in any form whatsoever during COVID-19, and this puts these alcoholics at great risk – they must never be forgotten, even as we acknowledge the gift that Zoom meetings can be. Simply: digital meetings are and will remain "not for everyone" for a plethora of reasons.

- Tim also aptly put out that we must reach out to absentees during this time: calls, check-ins, "of the record" meetings of 2 or 3 members, suggestions for AA video and/or literature as substitutes for in-person meetings, and so forth. Are we doing this? Are we being effective in doing so?

- Many of us acknowledged that our groups had three demographics/phenotypes:

- 1 – a solid core of Zoom-savvy regular attendees, mainly "veterans" of the program with extensive sobriety and experience with the steps. This likely categorizes most of us here tonight, at least to some extent;

- 2 – a second group of equally "stable" AAs in solid recovery for the long haul but for whom "Zoom isn't for me" or "I just don't feel comfortable enough online" for a range of reasons that it is not up to group 1 (or anyone) to judge; and

- 3 – everyone else, including those in and out of the program for months or years; those getting back into the program after a hiatus, and those who are still raw, desperate, seeking advice, solutions, or just out of rehab/corrections/hospital.

Most in group 2 have been in contact with members of group 1, typically by phone or email, and these present fewest worries, but obviously should not be forgotten. It was noted that group 2 is not to be faulted for their decisions to opt out of Zoom meetings, but that many groups feel the tangible loss of good insights, experience in the program, and temporary sponsorship that usually comes with these people and is suddenly lost to the groups they belong to.

- But what about group 3? It's hard enough to get to a meeting at the best of times ... are zoom meetings welcoming enough? Is there room for 1-on-1 "coaching" and "come back soon" 12-stepping approaches, nuanced and thoughtful, no undue pressure, on Zoom? Can we be kind, compassionate and effective without sounding preachy to the newcomers on Zoom? Are we simply letting potential newcomers fall through the cracks?

- Many of us have witnessed newcomers at Zoom meetings, but probably fewer than at other times. And it seems hit or miss as whether they come back. Are our 12-stepping approaches failing during COVID-19? How can we do better?

- One great idea would be "Beginners' Groups" online, with "rooms" for smaller break-outs that

might reduce fears and nervousness. Also, because newcomers tend to be younger, the technological fears may be fewer.

- It was also raised that some members use Zoom as an excuse to not attend meetings period, as in: "I'd go to the AA meeting if it was in-person, but will pass given it is online only" – Many of these individuals are fence sitters with respect to the whole program of recovery, not Zoom in particular, rationalizing their excuses in true alcoholic fashion on any available cause. Here too we can do better: "How can an hour online listening to other alcoholics possibly harm you? On the other hand, it could save your life". So, in addition to the newcomers, we need to consider the "in-betweeners" and those "on the cusp" with attentiveness and compassion. Workable options include the online core (group 1 discussed above) asking gently about these individuals before and/or after formal Zoom AA meetings are held, and making sure they are contacted. Often, getting a cell number or an email from relatively new attendees is easier said than done – but the sense is that having the ability to reach out – and doing so - far exceeds the perils or not doing so.

- Again, in defense of Zoom, it was reiterated that the capacity to visit groups literally all over the world, and how great Zoom is for "out of towners", largely outweigh inconveniences such as the occasional zoom bomb – but again this is the perspective of the converted. As an aside, Tim mentioned closing the joining of meetings on time sharply (so no latecomers) as an effective tool to obviate Zoom bombing.

- The above point got the thinking redirected a bit – again notwithstanding a degree of pro-Zoom bias. We are gathered in a general sense to discuss how we are going to return to normal in the weeks and months ahead. But normal will be a new normal, and there is no going back! We need to consider, in addition to getting back to our traditional meetings, that the Zoom resources have become important to many for many reasons, and indeed a plan should exist within AA – perhaps at the Area or District levels – to maintain or even grow the level of Zoom-hosted AA meetings and interactivity. Many have come to depend on these resources – just think of the mobility-limited – so these resources need our attention, even as we begin to transition back to a "new normal" – whatever that may look like. We will need to establish continuity.

- In general, the groups we represent have seen steady attendance with consistent, but by no means extraordinary, numbers. Is this good enough to get us through COVID-19? Is our mission statement at present to merely survive the pandemic, or is it to actively grow/change the ways AA does its mission as a whole as the pandemic continues? These are hard but necessary questions, for all levels of AA organization. How does this affect our seventh tradition? As the pandemic prolongs, is the solvency of some groups in peril, particularly if they remain "on the hook" for rental spaces (noting that this is not an issue for most churches and rec. centers"?)

- Finally, despite the possibility of in-person meetings as soon as June 30, most of us feel we are not ready to resume in two weeks from today. Thus we need to remain flexible enough to respond in real time, day-to-day, and allow that Zoom's presence in the AA world is not going away any time soon. Even discussion of meeting outdoors, for example on the bleachers of the rec center where my own group meets, have been met with, at best, lukewarm reception, meaning we will continue to use Zoom primarily for at least another month, if not more, into the future. What this future looks like exactly remains up to us!

Main Room

Anxiety - contact someone and ask them to speak with the host of the meeting to admit you and made an accommodation for you to keep your video off

Members are concerned about being recorded

- Adjust the chair script or chat to everyone to announce that the meeting is not being recorded
- Help them to understand how Zoom works (red dot in corner would indicate

recording)

- Let them know that as a participant, you can use whatever name or picture you want to remain anonymous if you are concerned