

Self-Help Group: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Meeting's Name: Hand in Hand

Today's topic: Reflections

Offers a variety of topics daily.

Available online and in person

Online: queensaa.org/meetings/?tsml-attendance_option=online

Physical address: 110-54 Farmers Blvd. St Albans, NY

Self-Help Group: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

The group meets daily at a physical location or online for those who cannot make it in person. It offers a variety of topics from sharing each one's faith to self-motivation to stay sober and many more. It is a voluntary membership being formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance and common need, overcoming social issues such as alcoholism, and desiring to change, which they believe cannot be met by other institutions. The group offers an open-ended and closed-ended meeting. Today is an open meeting, thus anybody who wants to join can include an intern or observer like me. It starts at 1:00 pm and ended at 2:00 pm

With thirty-five (35) attendees at this meeting, the majority are male, ages approximately 20-75 years old, and mostly black. Although there were several who spoke, there was one leader (a male) who was able to facilitate the group from start to finish. He introduced himself as the chairperson and discussed the direction of the meeting, including what topic to focus on, and his obligations to bring the group back if some members are straying away from the topic. There was a brief time for self-introduction since it looks like most members are regular attendees, and also a chance to greet one another and give updates.

The leader went straight to the formal opening by calling a female member who reads and reflects briefly on reflections from the AA big book. Another female member spoke important information about the group, what are the requirements to become a member, and where to find them including an online link or address. One male member read another passage from the AA's big book with interpretations and reflections. But besides from 3 to 4 individuals who spoke earlier, the group has one main speaker set

Self-Help Group: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

aside from this meeting who is also a member. He shared or discussed deeply his own personal journey with alcoholism, his faith, and his commitment to stay well and stay with AA.

By showing hands, members were given 3-5 minutes to share their own stories. Several shared their journey with alcoholism and with other drugs which now become the story of the past, according to them, because of consistent AA attendance and their desire to get better. Most members claim that they are now decades of sobriety, and constantly reminding themselves of the pitfall of being complacent attending meetings. One member explicitly said that having been sober for 32 years, every day he was aware that with just one sip, he will throw away all the years that he had gained. Some pledged to go back to where they started and continue attending the meetings as many as they can.

I think every member who speaks is sending a message of commitment and conviction to what they believe works. And many because of this commitment, when they speak, it was observed to have a deep passion and brutal honesty for what has happened or what is happening. Particularly, I observed a pattern of solidarity and/ or cohesiveness to support the attainment and maintenance of individual goals, that is staying sober, at the same time fulfilling the overall goal as a group. For the new members or attendees, the chairperson welcomed them if they want to share as well. The meeting was ended by reciting the Serenity Prayer and the Lord's prayer. The meeting was dismissed at the exact time.

Self-Help Group: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

I believe this group had way past now the development of groups knowing the group has now set objectives, and the members have now set goals to accomplish. The structure has now been set as they decided to offer two sets of open-ended and closed-ended meetings. The duration was set to be ongoing weekly for 1-2 hours every meeting offering a variety of topics. For the stages of the group, I believe the group has now passed the pre-affiliation to the majority of the members, except for the new members. Power and Control were not observed in this group instead there was a feeling of intimacy- the third stage of group development from Garland, Jones, and Kolodny model.

Emotional closeness was observed among the group members; however, personal and group decisions look like done in a more objective way. Members seem to communicate their experiences freely talking about the new pattern of behavior and their commitment to continue what they believe works. Leadership is shared evenly, roles are more functional, and organization is more efficient. The kind of individualized therapeutic cohesion has been achieved because the group experience has all along valued and nurtured individual integrity.

In terms of separation, I believe the AA group is not spousing for it. The idea of separation is the final stage as the group's purposes have been achieved according to Garland, et al. However, in an AA group, a lifetime personal commitment to stop drinking and a lifetime commitment to attend meetings remain after someone becomes sober or has reached the goal. Thus, AA does not seem to fit into the separation stage model. Gaining sobriety or reaching a personal goal in the self-help AA model is to support others also. The de-labeling and re-labeling that one is an alcoholic every time

Self-Help Group: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

they meet look like being fixated on the past and unable to give room to move to the next label and/or level of life.

However, besides some criticism about the AA group, the effectiveness and popularity of this group have been known to many different countries including the United States of America. According to January 2022 data from Alcoholics Anonymous, there are 120,455 Alcoholics Anonymous groups in 175 different countries and estimates of about two million members. In the United States alone, there are 40,143 groups scattered in different States of America, (www.aaa.org). This shows how AA group is helping millions all around the world daily including here in the United States.

In my observation and opinion, an AA group is an effective tool for many who suffer and overcomes alcoholism and want to find a lifetime commitment to sobriety. I also observed that to some, the AA group must work in tandem with the medication assistant treatment, one-on-one counseling, and to some with the help of individual therapy to address co-occurring diagnoses and other mental health issues.

References

Zastrow, C. (2018). (10th ed.). Empowerment Series: Social Work with Groups: Comprehensive Practice and Self-Care. ISBN-13:978-1337567916; ISBN-10: 1337567914

Alcoholics Anonymous www.aa.org

Emrick, C.D. Tonigan, J.S. Montgomery, H., & Little, L. (1993). Alcoholics Anonymous: What is currently known? In B.S. McCrady & W.R. Miller (Eds.). *Research on Alcoholics Anonymous: Opportunities and alternatives* (pp. 41-76). Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies.

Kaskutas L.A. (2009). Alcoholics anonymous effectiveness: faith meets science. *Journal of addictive diseases*, 28(2), 145-157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/105508809027722464>

Tonigan, J.S. Connors, G.J., & Miller, W.R. (1998). Special populations in Alcoholics Anonymous. *Alcohol health and research world*, 22(4), 281-285.

Trice, H.M., Roman, P.M., Delabeling, Relabeling, and Alcoholics Anonymous, *Social Problems*, Volume 17, Issue 4, Spring 1970, Pages 538-546, <https://doi.org/10.2307/799685>