

# TELEPHONE SERVICE NEWSLETTER

## SEPTEMBER 2020

Welcome to the Autumn edition. If you are involved in telephone service, then this newsletter is for you. If anyone would like a paper copy, please email the editor at [telephones6.sc@aamail.org](mailto:telephones6.sc@aamail.org) or text 07813 515423 with your name and address and this will be sent in the post.

### TELEPHONE SEMINAR

#### Saturday 14th August 2021 in York

for all Region TLOs and Intergroup TLOs

We were sad that the intended Telephone Service Seminar for Intergroup TLOs could not take place in August due to Covid-19. Instead, we hope to welcome as many of you as possible next year instead. Further details will follow in the Spring Newsletter.

However, the Annual Region TLOs meeting did go ahead, albeit on Zoom and, although not the same as meeting face to face in York, was still a welcome opportunity to connect with each other online and review the telephone service over this past year as well as sharing ideas going forward.

### NTSC Introduction

The National Telephone Sub-Committee has seven members. We've been taking it in turns to introduce ourselves: I'm Ann M. When I came into AA in 2010 the importance of doing service was hammered home. 'You have to give it away to keep it' I heard. I became a telephone responder and 12 Stepper for Coventry & Warwickshire. After two years in 2013 I moved to the East Riding of Yorkshire. In 2015 the TLO was moving the helpline from BT to Switchboard Free and introducing a text messaging system to contact the 12 Steppers. A new TLO was needed as he was rotating out. People were very enthusiastic about the new systems but no-one wanted to be TLO so I volunteered. As TLO I promoted the advantages of the new Virtual Switchboards and text messaging systems around my Region and further afield. I was appointed to the Telephone Sub-Committee in 2017. I do not have a specific role. I tend to pick up the work that is involved with new telephone technology. I support the RTLO contact with admin matters and the Forum. Doing service outside my homegroup has introduced me to a wide variety of people and expanded my horizons in ways that would not have otherwise been possible. I am very grateful for the opportunities.



### HELPLINE UPDATES

As from 7th September, **London 0800 calls** will be diverted to the telephone helplines nationwide.

Responders should pass enquiries to 07944 611105 – see London Calls Update on page 2

The **Manchester Helpline** number is 0161 327 1935 until further notice

#### Polish Helpline numbers:

England 0203 916 0097  
(Mon-Fri 7-9pm)

Scotland 07598 853255  
(Daily 7-9pm)

Midlands 0121 286 7606  
(Daily 6-9pm)

## **DISSEMINATING INFORMATION/COMMUNICATION**

Do you receive emails from your TLO (or RTLO)? Do you read them? Do you act on information received if asked? It's hard to keep up with the barrage of daily emails and can be tempting to ignore/forget to look at separate aamail.org notifications. I write as a former RTLO/TLO and current responder who is guilty of not always following the above. My intentions are good, but I may put it off and then forget to read a notification later. However, in order for the Telephone Service to run smoothly, I know that I must read and act on information received. It isn't fair on Responders not to have the correct information to assist them when on phone duty. For example, despite emails going out in the early part of lockdown, many were not aware of either the additional 0800 Virtual 12 stepper support line, or that the London office had closed and Allie (on the NTSC) had, until recently, been fielding all their messages via a dedicated mobile number for responders to phone.

Communication with our helpline colleagues is a great way of recapping on recent information received and strengthening relationships. Covid-19 has brought the unexpected benefit – of being able to meet up online in a way that we may not have considered before. Instead of the geographic difficulties to meet up somewhere centrally, RTLOs can meet up online regularly with TLOs, who in turn could meet up with their responders. Face to face workshops are best, but interspersing these with online forums could enable a more frequent, regular contact with each other. Some areas have already been practising this and meet every two months. For others, it will be a new venture. Telephone responding is a solo role and opportunities to share best practice are always inspiring. Writing this has inspired me to ask our TLO to arrange a Zoom meeting for us – I hope it may inspire others to do the same!

*Lisella W, SW Region*

## **LONDON CALLS UPDATE**

Allie F has now handed what we can call the 'London Calls Phone' over to the London Telephone Service (while their home responding service is being set up). They will now be answering calls and responding to voicemails/texts, so Responders, please keep passing callers as normal. The number is 07944-611105. Below is a personal message from Allie:

*Dear responders/operators, thank you so much for helping the suffering alcoholics in London by passing their details to me during the past 5 months. It has been lovely to meet so many of you from all corners of our island - I will miss our chats! In loving fellowship, Allie*

## **SAFEGUARDING UPDATE**

As yet, there is no report from the Board following their review of safeguarding issues as they relate to the Fellowship, largely due to Conference not being able to take place this year. It is considered that the telephone service is particularly at risk from those wishing to gain access to vulnerable people through service in AA. Therefore, in the meantime, a small group of RTLOs – Jan V, Bob S and Peter G – will work together to create a document on safeguarding with regard to responding and 12 stepping, which will be presented to the Telephone Sub-Committee. We will keep you informed.

## **AAGB WEBSITE – MEETING FINDER AND DETAILS**

- Local helpline numbers are now on the meeting details of the meeting finder section.
- If your meeting is returning to face to face or becoming hybrid, please let GSO know so they can update the website.

## **ARMED SERVICES 12 STEP LIST UPDATE**

Armed Services (past or present) volunteers wishing to go on the 12 Step list should contact Jonathan on 07770 737450 or [aservices4.sc@aamail.org](mailto:aservices4.sc@aamail.org)

# TRAINING

At the RTLO meeting, Jeannie F gave a short presentation on Responder training and the importance of projecting a positive impression of the Fellowship. Whether you are giving or receiving training, the key points below are good to bear in mind. Never be afraid of asking for refresher training – principles remain the same, but processes can change over the years and it's always good to re-discuss best practice given that responding is a solo role.

## 8 KEY POINTS

- Remember you are on shift and find cover if unavailable.
- Set time aside for shift without interruption.
- Have everything you need to hand and turn off voicemail.
- Be aware that you are the 'voice of AA' and that first impressions are vital.
- Answer in a warm, friendly manner, be helpful.
- Keep calls brief (they are not 12 step calls).
- Always safeguard anonymity of members and don't give out member contact details.
- Pass calls to 12 steppers/other helplines as soon after shift as is practicable.



## FEEDBACK ON TELEPHONE SERVICE DURING LOCKDOWN

### *Miles P, Devon V12 Stepper on the 0800 support line*

Calls have been averaging sometimes up to ten a day. Quite a few callers hang up on me when I answer, and I take this to be the expected ambivalence of those in drink or suffering. There have been a copious range of callers, some with long term sobriety having difficulties, ranging to those still drinking and desperate for a solution. I hope to leave those I talk to with practical solutions, suggestions and a little more hope.

### *Heather G, London V12 Stepper on the 0800 support line*

At first several calls a day came to me during this time, but by the end of July there were days when no calls came at all. The local Helplines had more Responders and 12 steppers by then. I found most of the calls in the beginning came from either members who had lost touch with their groups because lockdown, and venue closures, happened very suddenly, or else from people who had been brought to a realisation that they had a drink problem. We were also able to help newcomers and members who had no technical confidence to get to grips with Zoom, something that very few of us had heard of before lockdown, but with which thousands of us are now feeling very familiar and comfortable.

### *Cameron, Responder, Scotia*

I am so grateful working with the Scottish helpline during Covid-19, it has kept me busy and connected. I am impressed with the telephone operators who have kept up-to-date with all the changes during these difficult times.

## **FEEDBACK CONT.**

### ***David, Leeds***

In the early part of lockdown, 100% of calls were asking if meetings were taking place at all. During the middle part, calls mainly revolved around how to join Zoom meetings, spouses who had become aware of a partner's drinking habit, or the problem drinker whose drinking has got worse due to being at home alone. Presently, there is a mixture of calls including about when physical meetings will resume. I know some have resumed but have no idea how to find out which ones. As a responder, my difficulties have been in trying to find accurate information.

### ***Judy, Ivybridge***

I have received roughly the same number of calls during Lockdown, and the same response - the relief and thanks that someone is at the end of the phone who listens, understands, and can offer help and hope. Newcomers, in my experience, are not fazed by using the internet to find meetings. A few, whom I have happily subsequently met at a virtual meeting, have said that it was less daunting than journeying to, and entering a room, for a physical meeting.

### ***Graham, Wales***

When lockdown happened, everyone stepped up. Happily spending more time talking to callers and hooking them up with online meetings and over the phone 12 stepping. The 0800 non-geographic 12 step line was particularly helpful. As a TLO it was great as everyone was at home and I didn't have to find shift cover for two months!

### ***Susie C, Brixham***

I have found the National Phone Directory most helpful, as I've been much busier on the Helpline during Lockdown. Locally (Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall) I have always been able to find a 12 stepper and /or direct the caller to online Zoom meetings and also notified a Zoom group member to look out and welcome the newcomer.

### ***Angela, Devon Central***

My experience as a responder has seen me take more phone calls from relatives and loved ones, mainly due to social distancing guidelines making it difficult for loved ones to be together and therefore wanting outside help.

### ***Lesley, NE Region***

My shifts have been busier without question. I have nothing but praise and thanks to members and groups who have overcome the restrictions of COVID19 and kept GSO informed of changes as they occur, and to GSO who have beavered away tirelessly to keep us up to date with the influx of changes. The arrangement for London callers has worked beautifully – passing their details to Allie who finds the appropriate 12-stepper during closure of the London office. My personal high was to take an email newcomer enquiry (as an online responder) and suggest the helpline, which was the number I was the responder for at that time and took the call when she rang.

### ***Geoff, Yorkshire***

I've found the helpline slightly busier nationally as opposed to locally, and thereby is one problem I have come across. I'm fortunate enough to have contact numbers for most cities in the UK and in the absence of Zoom details for meetings other than in North and West Yorkshire would have struggled to advise callers. Having said that, most first time callers have been more comfortable joining in by Zoom protecting their anonymity further.

### ***Clare, Cornwall***

I have found that through this pandemic the phone lines have been busier. At the start I spoke to a couple of older AA members who just couldn't access the online meetings as they didn't have the technology but as times have gone on, a lot of newcomers have been phoning in. Also, calls from responders from around the country as we have had several from elsewhere including London based. I really enjoy my service and hoping/knowing that you've helped someone is an amazing feeling.

### ***Karen, York***

I've only recently started as a responder so have nothing to compare with, but I have done 2 x 4hour shifts recently and had quite a number of calls – some new to AA, some returners and others enquiring about face-to-face meetings. I was able to direct most of my callers to 24-hour Zoom meetings and to action all my other calls to relevant people around the country. Everyone I spoke to was so grateful for someone on the end of the phone, just to know they were not alone.