

NATIONAL TELEPHONE SUB-COMMITTEE (NTSC) NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2018

A MESSAGE FROM JONATHAN P, TRUSTEE FOR TELEPHONES

I'm Jonathan, I am an alcoholic, I also am the Trustee for Telephones, I chair the NTSC and I have been involved with the telephone helpline one way and another for many years -- telephone service is something I always encourage people to consider. The Subcommittee does its best to help the Fellowship maintain the telephone system, to enable the suffering alcoholic access to a local contact in a manner which is efficient, effective and economic. What resonates for me is the Pledge "When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible." This doesn't change but there is always progress in how people can reach out (eg mobile phones) and the resources to deal with calls to the helpline. This Newsletter is an important point of contact for all involved in the Telephone service – to be able to share progress (e.g. the statistics), new ideas (eg new internet-based call management) – and as importantly to share our experience and support for such an important aspect of our primary purpose.

Jonathan P, Trustee

*The
Mayflower
lobby
telephone
- from where
Bill Wilson
rang Dr Bob
for the first
time.*



The annual Regional Telephone Liaison Officers meeting took place at GSO on 10-11th August. It was very well attended and productive. Problems and how to resolve them, best practice and fellowship was shared, sustained throughout with delicious home cooked snacks by Allie F.

Please aim to keep incoming calls to five minutes max when possible. This is partly to keep the line free for others calling and partly because the 0800 freephone number means it is more costly to the Fellowship.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION

To comply with GDPR TLOs should tell their responders that they are keeping a record of their personal data for the purposes of telephone service and will do so until they are told otherwise. This also applies to 12 step lists, so please pass this information on to your 12 step list coordinators. GSO requests that we use generic email addresses rather than personal ones. This is partly so continuity is maintained when one person rotates out and another takes over and partly to aid GDPR. You can request your AA email through the Helpdesk on the AA website <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>

BT PRESENTATION

Wayne Selmes from BT gave a presentation on the phasing out of existing ISDN technology used by AA helplines and the new Cloud Voice system. BT is phasing out ISDN lines and moving customers to IP (Internet over Protocol) systems. The target date for closing ISDN lines is 2025. New ISDN contracts are not available from 2020.

Wayne explained that because of the age of many of our helplines, the phasing out of the old ISDN is proving problematic. Dorset recently found their line cut off without warning and found it extremely difficult to find any explanation or solution. After several days the solution offered by BT was to transfer calls to a neighbouring helpline while they tried to sort it out. It turns out that the physical connections for the line have been removed so Dorset must either move asap to another BT contract or find a non-BT alternative.

It is likely that some of the problems helplines have been experiencing with logging on/off etc may be due to this phasing out of old technology. In addition one responder recently bought a new BT handset and found they cannot use it to log on to the helpline. The old technology is rapidly becoming very problematic.

You can find videos explaining the system here:

cloud voice portal – administrator view

<https://vimeo.com/177365132>

cloud voice demo video

<https://vimeo.com/194809169>

Phasing out of current technology links:

<https://www.bttcomms.com/phasing-out-of-isdn/>

and

<https://cellular-solutions.co.uk/2018/01/24/isdn-switch-off-business-needs-know/>

The links above give information about the change and suggestions for finding non-BT alternatives. A quick google for virtual switchboards, 'hosted VOIP' (Voice Over Internet Protocol) or 'hosted pbx' will produce lots of suggestions and information. Some helplines have already moved to a virtual switchboard called 'Switchboard Free'.

The solution offered by BT is the new Cloud Voice system to which the local helplines can transfer. East of Scotland moved to the early version of this, called Cloud Phone, and are very pleased with it. There are many advantages:

* It is considerably cheaper – estimated at £42.00 per month total. Five year contract lock-in (unless moving to another B.T. product). You will have two licences, an admin licence and one for the responders to log on.

* It offers much improved log on and admin facilities.

* Detailed statistics of usage are readily accessible online.

* Responders do not need internet access to log on or to receive calls.

* A facility for calls to be diverted to a second number if the line is busy.

* Automatic voicemail facility.

* No loss of service during the changeover from the old system to the new. *But please clarify this for your own situation.

Important:

Doing nothing is not the best option. Start exploring your options soon and make your decision to move either to the BT Cloud Voice or an alternative as soon as possible. While the ISDN lines remain in use until 2025, as we have seen our helplines are likely to be affected from now on.

Wayne is the A.A. 'Relationship Manager'. All enquiries about our helplines, both our current systems and the Cloud Voice systems, should be referred to Wayne as below:

Wayne Selmes, Senior ICT Specialist/Dedicated Line Specialist, BT Local Business
Mobile: **07442 490 152**, Telephone: **0191 461 0800** option 5, Fax: **0191 247 5801**
email wayne.selmes@btlocalbusiness.co.uk

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM TLOS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Jenny

My name is Jenny and I am the TLO for Chelsea. I co-ordinate 4 shifts a month on behalf of Chelsea and find the service very rewarding. I am just over 9 years sober and have always enjoyed doing service of any kind, tea making, treasury, co-secretary and literature. It is a great way to meet people and I enjoy the fellowship on offer in AA. I vaguely remember someone suggesting I do phone service and I turned up at the office in Tower Bridge slightly nervous and not sure what to expect. I had been working at home for a long time so to sit in an office and answer phones for 4 hours was quite nerve racking. However I love it. No call is the same, friends and family ring in bewildered by the illness and needing reassurance and support and the suffering alcoholic who wants help. Soon I had trained to be a Team Leader and co-ordinated the calls to the responders all over London waiting to take the suffering alcoholic to a meeting.

It is great service helping me stay sober by hearing the illness at first hand. Many of the callers are still drinking and just baffled as to why they cannot stop. I find it very rewarding and I would recommend anyone to do a year or two on the telephones. It can be as little as 4 hours a month, or like me you can do more and grow into the responsibility of leading a shift and helping to keep this valuable service available to the alcoholics who just might with that call get to a meeting and discover the joys of recovery.

In service,
Jenny of Chelsea.

Lesley

Hi, my name is Lesley. I am a very grateful recovering alcoholic. My entry to Alcoholics Anonymous was totally down to members doing service – initially PI leaving a contact with the drug and alcohol unit I contacted – thank you for that. (This was long before 0800 and telephone responders and internet and chat now and online contacts.) It seems very primitive now but it worked as did the Samaritans sending us referrals. I said, or rather demanded of the unit 'I need help and I need it now – don't make me wait 9 weeks like you did to see the psychiatrist' and lo and behold I got a call within an hour from AA. Not at all what I was expecting - I wasn't that bad!! I howled and bawled my way through an hour long call (I'm told), and got to my first meeting the next night. What had happened? What had been said? Why did I go to that meeting? I couldn't tell you then and I certainly can't remember now but a seed was sown and I've kept coming back. Thank God for the phone service and those who serve in any and all capacities in order to get our message of hope and recovery out there. Anonymous but not invisible. I may never have found us but for them.

So it's my turn to pay it back and be there for the newcomer in any way I can – how could I not? And today I can do Online Responder Service too which I love, which directs the 'caller' to the phones and/or meetings. If I'm on phone duty at the same time and have suggested our local helpline number to them I've then picked up the call myself. That's bizarre. It must seem rather strange to the caller too. It really does embrace the Fellowship in action. It works. And not forgetting the friend or family member who calls at their wits end - I can signpost them too and they can get the help they so desperately need. So, thank you telephone service. You were there for me nearly 25 years ago. My duty and privilege is to be there for the next person.

CONTRIBUTIONS cont.

Lisa M, WYI -

So I found myself at a particularly difficult period in my life, and I went to see my sponsor to do some work surrounding these issues. The time comes for her telephone responders shift to start. My sponsor gets herself prepared. Loads up the AA website, folder, paper etc. And the phone rings....away she goes... I'm aware that my sponsor is not only helping and supporting me, she is helping, supporting and listening to the still suffering alcoholic. Now, even 'in my state of self', I can still grasp that my sponsor is not only giving back, but is arming herself against that first drink. I'm blown away by the powerfulness of this exchange. By the empathy that is shown to the caller, who needless to say is emotional. Then by the matter of fact way my sponsor confirms that 'yes she is an alcoholic too'. So I observed, I wait for the second call of the afternoon to end and find myself asking 'how much sobriety do you need to take on this role?', 'how does it work?', 'how do you get the role?'.

The time came, I had reached a year sober..! This is incredible. You see I'd previously had 7 years sobriety and I basically gave my gift away. In short, I'd moved home, stopped going to meetings. picked up a resentment and polished that resentment till it shone. Distanced myself from my higher power. Then came those old character defects...slowly creeping in. I picked up a drink....'just one weekend' I told myself...'one good go at it and I'll be done' ...oh yes, I'm talking to myself again...and answering back. Well so much for one weekend binge. Three years later, I'm broken and soul-destroyed, and practically crawling back to AA.

Needless to say, today I'm overwhelmed with gratitude, for my sobriety, the fellowship and the warm welcome back I received, and to my generous sponsor, who has guided me, and along with this programme, has helped me to work through my insecurities and fears. But mainly for my sponsor leading by example, this has encouraged me to attend the recent York Telephone Responders Workshop and to put my name forward for the rota.

I realised I needed to change, to give back via service and keep myself anchored right in the center of this wonderful fellowship. The communication and information I've received from our Telephone Liaison Officer has been fabulous, very reassuring. Lots of pointers, guidance and an encouragement to keep in contact with other telephone responders.

Foreword to Third Edition...

'Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope.' My first ever shift takes place next week....I wonder if anyone will call.....

Thank you to Lisa, Lesley and Jenny for sending these in.

For access to the updated A-Z local directory, together with other resources visit <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Service/Disciplines/Telephones>

The next newsletter will be published in February 2019.