

2024 Area Sponsorship Workshop Report

The area sponsorship workshop was held virtually on the WebEx platform on Sunday February 4th at 2 PM. The workshop concept came out of recent data and questions from assembly members about the need and lack of sponsorship. The WebEx platform was chosen over Zoom because the platform could manage a larger number of attendees better than a member's personal Zoom account. WebEx is able to record audio and transcript options for a workshop to be posted to Area Website.

Approximately 92 people attended - majorities were from Virginia. There were quite a few from New York and California, and one from British Columbia. The workshop flier was posted on the WSO website, the Virginia State website, and last minute on the Al-Anon app, which also drew attendees. District representatives were encouraged to share the information throughout their district. The panel had two moderators who asked attendees that dialed in by phone to identify by first name only and changed their phone number to their name, monitored the chat box and assisted. The panel decided that the workshop would not be recorded by Panel consciences. The panel was not in 100% agreement, and it was felt it was important to protect each panel members' opinion.

The committee chose to use a panel format of three women and three men, each of which had been in recovery for many years. Most, if not, all panel speakers have had several sponsors, which created a very diverse collection of shares from experience, strength and hope.

The first half of the workshop (Becoming A Sponsor) focused on where panelists shared, when they felt comfortable becoming a sponsor and their fears, expectations, and need to use their sponsor and the second part of the panel (Being A Sponsor) spoke about their role, their limits in terms of time, energy, and lessons when sponsees were asking for help that is beyond the sponsorship role. Several speakers referred to the Al-Anon sponsorship pamphlet and the sponsorship bookmark as a guide for clarity in the sponsorship relationship. Several mentioned the difference between fellowship and sponsorship. The focus of sponsorship was working the steps, and a friendship is nice, but optional, which often develops over time.

Questions focused on what literature they used to sponsor, how often they meet with sponsees, and whether a sponsor was a friend. The theme was clear: there are no "musts" in Al-Anon as they shared different approaches to sponsoring different literature and different methods. Each panelist shared the importance of meeting for coffee and discussing expectations of the sponsor and the Sponsee to come to a mutual agreement of approach and how often they would connect if possible. All panelists shared their joy of sponsoring members. Each member shared, in their own way, how HP worked in the relationship and it was a spiritual practice. The points were made about sponsors being human and the need to avoid putting sponsors on pedestal. Using a phone list and meeting for coffee was a common thread. Boundaries related to sponsorship - in terms of time and energy, finding a sponsor and changing a sponsor or sponsee were discussed.

The panel encouraged attendees to discuss sponsorship at their meetings, and to consider having district workshops on sponsorship. It was the hope of the panel that this workshop would serve as a model to spread the joy, hope and need for more people to engage in sponsorship. The goal of the workshop was to plant a seed for more discussions at all levels in Al-Anon.

After a date was selected, the committee members met for an hour weekly the month prior to the workshop to discuss the format, share their stories. Practice timing and reflect. At one point it was suggested that everyone should write their thoughts to clarify their message and discern if they were talking about their personal sponsorship journey, being a sponsor, or how they sponsor. This preparation process ended up to be valuable perhaps because it served like a bit of a mini-inventory on sponsorship for the panelists and allowed reflection, which in turn strengthened the workshop sharing.

Feedback will be encouraged from attendees and the districts. Please share your thoughts with your group or district reps. Thank you.

The Workshop Committee