

May 18, 1942

To:

Miss Margaret R. Burger, Secretary,
The Alcoholic Foundation,
30 Vesey Street,
New York City.

Dear Miss Burger:

Here's a story of the Philadelphia Group from the handbook standpoint, as requested in your recent mimeograph.

Our nucleus was derived from six alcoholics known to be such through their written contact with Alcoholic Foundation. Two had dried up via the Oxford Group, one of them attempted work upon other alcoholics without plan and without results. Another had attained four months sobriety through the A.A. article in "Liberty". Group organization came in February 1940 when a New York A.A. member moved to our city. He knew the background of the parent group and kept contacts with other fellowships actual or in formation. So we had the benefit of what they had found practicable.

The first few meetings were in the homes of these pioneer members. At the outset we were more fortunate than we knew in eliciting the interest of two physicians of high standing who had alcoholic problems with close relatives. They joined our enterprise with as much ardor as the seven alcoholics and had a large room in St. Luke's Hospital reserved for our Thursday night meetings, which the public may attend. One or the other of the physicians speaks at these meetings. It serves to lend a medical approval to our work.

Following a trail blazed by the parent group at Bellevue Hospital, we established similar contact with its local equivalent, Philadelphia General Hospital. The well known psychiatrist in charge there cooperated intelligently and added further prestige to the medical recognition we had previously acquired. A small group visits patients in the alcoholic ward each Saturday afternoon. The physicians and nurses indicate which patients are likely A.A. material. They are given a chat and booklets, and invited to attend the clubhouse upon discharge. This has been a fertile field for prospects and "graduates" relish the work with new patients.

On alternate Sundays a small group visits the House of Correction. Here, too, the authorities attempt to provide an audience of alcoholics who seem fed up on drinking and ripe for consideration of our ideas. At first we were importuned by these men to have their ninety day commitments shortened, which annoyed the superintendent. Now we tell them at the outset that we will have no hand in carrying messages to the outside; that we come only to tell them of a plan that will relieve them of their alcoholism; that they are welcome at our clubhouse and our meetings. As in Philadelphia General Hospital, we are spared the necessity of convincing House of Correction inmates that they are problem drinkers. The police force and the magistrates have done that for them.

Just before we attained our first Group birthday on of our members established a pleasant and useful contact with the Salvation Army Industrial Headquarters, at Roxborough. It has proved a handy stepping-stone in the transition from Philadelphia General and House of Correction back to employment. At the Salvation Army they are provided with clean quarters and good food for which they render services in the factory or on the delivery trucks of the Industrial Department. The pay is small which acts as an incentive for the men to move into more lucrative jobs when they feel ready. A.A. members at Salvation Army hold meetings there every Tuesday, joined by others of our main Group. They attend our Thursday meetings at St. Luke's Hospital in a body.

From the first we felt that there was inherent danger in having a head man to govern our organization. So instead of a president, we decided to function through an Operating Committee, elected at the monthly business meeting to serve for the ensuing month. The person senior in membership and sobriety is automatically chairman of the six members who compose the committee. They take full charge of the Group's business, exclusive of handling the funds, which is the province of the Treasurer, elected for six months.

The Operating Committee conducts the meetings and appoints the leaders of such gatherings. It is especially responsible for the following regular meetings:

Monday - 8:30 P.M. Clubhouse, Meeting for alcoholics only.
Tuesday - 12:00 noon, Business Men's Luncheon; 8:30 P.M. Salvation Army.
Thursday - 8:30 P.M. St. Luke's Hospital, for public and members.
Friday - 8:30 P.M. Clubhouse, for new members.
Saturday - 2:00 P.M. Clubhouse to Philadelphia General Hospital.
Sunday - (alternate) House of Correction.

It can call upon any member outside of the Committee for assignment to an alcoholic prospect or for any reasonable A.A. purpose and it passes upon small loans made to members in the course of rehabilitation. The problem of the cold broke alcoholic with no place to get help is one that new groups are apt to encounter early in their existence. How it is met is important because some forty percent of the new members is apt to be so situated. The new man may take your assistance and use it wisely or foolishly. He may think he has hit a gold mine and work the entire group quietly but carefully for quite a sum of money.

In Philadelphia, we have developed the following plan and procedure:
All requests for financial assistance are referred to the operating committee, who, if the cause is worthy, advance credit in the Clubhouse restaurant for meals and cash to the extent of a place to sleep in one of the local missions. We then place the man in some employment such as Hospital Orderly or the like. On his first pay-day he is expected to repay us for what we have spent. If on this pay-day he is still sober, our small investment is returned and we have a man well advanced in the program. If he is a "phony", or has not the desire to stop drinking, or is not an alcoholic, he is gone and we have lost very little and none of the individual members have lost.

This plan may seem very cold and ungenerous on first reading, but bear in mind the following:

1. If the man wants to stop drinking he is willing to do anything to achieve that goal and the man that is too good for that plan does not want real help - merely financial.
2. The man who wants to regain his place in society wants to do it himself under his own power, without too many obligations to others.
3. He is probably tremendously in debt already and we do not want to put him in any more than is really necessary.
4. He is taking a job that is not going to be too great a strain on him mentally or nervously but will still keep him occupied enough to keep his mind away from himself and make him tired enough to sleep at night and allow himself to fall into a set of decent habits and regular routine.
5. He will not have enough money in his pockets to get drunk on.
6. He is prevented from pan-handling members. This is not necessarily to protect the members, but to protect the man. We find that it is too easy to spoil a good prospect with kindness.

We have used this method in Philadelphia for two years with most satisfactory results. We have applied it regardless of former social standing or financial rating. We have even used it on some former members of other groups who have come to us. The fellows who have come up this way are themselves very proud of it and the Group is most proud of them and they are held in very high esteem.

The financial report on these loans is most interesting. In the last year we loaned \$588.98 and of that sum only \$146.41 remains unpaid to date. Contrast this with your own "loans" to drunks.

While the policy is not ironclad (we have had two exceptions) we do not encourage ministers and priests to address our gatherings. We are afraid that it might lead new people to think we are interested in some particular type of worship. On the other hand, our meetings have addressed bible classes and other church bodies and will carry our message to any interested associations.

Source material for a handbook should include a few experiments that went sour so that they will not be repeated in new Fellowships that are forming. One such comes to mind. We held a theory that men having difficulty with the A.A. program might fare better if we imposed some responsibility upon them. So the January 1941 Operating Committee was composed entirely of such fellows. Charged with the duty of running our Group one member of this Committee "slipped" two days after it assumed office. Before the end of the month every last one of them had gone off the deep end, finally the chairman. We see dangers also in having men too recently

out of drink addressing our meetings. From the showmanship standpoint they are usually effective, but it frequently does something to their emotional organization which is not helpful. Getting too holy too fast has also been observed as a possible danger sign. The gutter - to sainthood - and back to the gutter is fast travelling but hardly the trip we planned for our fellow alcoholic.

We can never cease looking upon 1537 Pine Street as unique, for it is at once a club and a hospital. We enjoy a social life that is given only to people who mingle in their common deliverance. Yet, each is still an afflicted person, each at a different point on the road of recovery. Each is groping for the answers that are contained in the broad pattern of the twelve steps. We who are sick of mind and spirit, to varying degrees, here apply the medicine of helpful conversation. We'd hate to think of parting with our clubhouse. Read more of how we handle it in the copy of our letter to the Chicago Group, attached.

Please tell Bill Wilson for our membership that the Philly boys and girls look forward to publication of his handbook. It will furnish us with some of the answers that heretofore we had to find by the costlier method of trial and error.

Regards to Bill and Lois and to all of you of the Foundation, from our gang in Philadelphia.

Cordially,
THE PHILADELPHIA A.A. FELLOWSHIP
By its MAY OPERATING COMMITTEE

Signed,
Joseph E. T.
H. K. S.
Carl R.
Joseph McK.
James F.
Geo. I. S., Chairman

Enclosures:
Financial Statements (2)
Copy of letter to Chicago Group dated 5/10/42