

THE OUTER CIRCLE

Carrying the message of hope to the still-suffering sex addict since 1988



MEETING
UPSTAIRS

INSIDE:

- METAPHORICAL BULLETS
- ONE'S FIRST MEETING
- LEARNING FROM HUMOR
- SHAME AND GRACE





International Service Organization of SAA, Inc.

TOC articles contain the experiences and opinions of individual SAA members and do not represent the official views or positions of the ISO of SAA, Inc. or the SAA fellowship as a whole.

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The Outer Circle Mission

The mission of *The Outer Circle* is to provide information from the ISO and to share the experience, strength, and hope members have obtained from working the SAA program of recovery. As the first iteration put it in 1988, *The Outer Circle* newsletter “carries the message of hope to the sex addict who still suffers”—especially prisoners and others who don’t have the Internet.

Through *TOC*, SAA members contribute articles and poems that focus on working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. It also communicates ISO news, regional activities, and other items of interest.

SAA meetings are encouraged to reproduce *TOC* at no charge and display it alongside other SAA literature. To keep costs down, please print out the online version.

If you have comments or suggestions, please see contact information on page 30. To have an article considered for publication, see our Submission Guidelines on page 31.

To ensure that future issues can be offered without cost, please consider making a tax-deductible donation now to support publication of the newsletter.

May - June 2024

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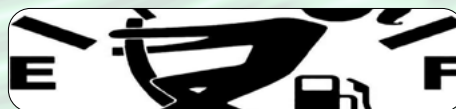
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Share *The Outer Circle* with your recovery friends in SAA and encourage them to submit their experience, strength, and hope (see page 31).

FROM THE EDITOR

From Shame to Grace

BY ALEX B.

THE OUTER CIRCLE
EDITOR

*If you feel inspired
to share your story,
remember they
can be submitted
online (saa-recovery.org/tocsubmission) or via
toc@saa-recovery.org.*

It's printed on many of our chips and coins, four simple words that can move mountains:

"From Shame to Grace."

For much of my time in recovery, I found it impossible to believe that I could be moving from shame to... well, anything, really. Every lost opportunity, every disappointed face of a loved one that I had harmed, every glimpse I caught of myself in the mirror gave me a new chance to feel badly about the hurt I had brought into being.

To make matters worse, I often felt as if I was incapable of moving past these feelings. After all, my standard methods of dealing with difficult feelings—my acting-out behaviors—were the cause of my shame and therefore removed from my toolbox. Through my program, my sponsors, and my partners in recovery I had to learn an entirely new set of skills to keep me moving along my journey.

But I kept going, one day at a time, through the help of my Higher Power. And somewhere along the way, a trusted advisor reminded me of the often-cited speech by Teddy Roosevelt, describing the fighter who proceeds with his battle even if he can't know its outcome:

"The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena...[W]ho spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

In that journey, in Roosevelt's arena, I began to find some grace.

I hope the pieces in this month's issue help you do the same.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

What more we can do!

BY TRACY R.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ISO OF SAA, INC.**

*In the end, it still
comes down to
one sex addict
helping another.*

I recently had the privilege and the pleasure of presenting on the topic of “International Service within the ISO of SAA Service Structure” at a hybrid workshop on service given by SAA South Africa (Area 65). The event was attended by approximately twenty-three individuals from group locations in Cape Town and Johannesburg and members online, with international participants from South Africa, Switzerland, and Ireland. The energy and excitement of these members was contagious!

As I was reviewing some of the group and area data in preparation for the workshop, the need to carry the SAA message internationally became apparent. 1,488 (69%) of the 2,142 registered groups are in the US, 358 (17%) are virtual, and 296 (24%) are outside the US.

Looking at ISO service, the gap widens – within the mere 494 groups (23%) that have GSRs, 428 (87%) of those are within the US, 20 (4%) are virtual, and 46 (9%) are outside the US.

The fellowship in South Africa was founded about eighteen years ago and has recently experienced a growth in membership and a surge of service activity, locally and internationally. (For more information, see their article, “*Bridging Recovery*,” in this issue.) They are showing up in service, and the benefits are obvious.

My recent experience with my fellows in South Africa demonstrates to me the power of SAA to end suffering and save lives, wherever we are. In the end, it still comes down to one sex addict helping another. When we bring our whole selves to this service, miracles do happen.

As I’m writing this, I’m asking myself, “How do we reach those who are suffering from this addiction and who have no idea there is a way out? What more can I do? What more can we do?”

DEAR GRACE

Growing one's outer circle

BY WOMEN'S
OUTREACH
COMMITTEE

Would you like to know more about the Women's Outreach Committee of SAA? This "Dear Grace" column is an ongoing service project of WOC and we would love your support. If interested, please reach out to grace@saa-women.org.

Disclaimer: We cannot guarantee that this advice will be equally applicable to every woman, although it is our hope that such will be the case. – SAA Women's Outreach Committee

Dear Grace,

My sponsor suggested I should try to grow my outer circle. So, in searching the outer circle and SAA I found you in the newsletter. I hope you can help. I currently have oodles of time, since I am no longer acting out or managing the resulting crisis. I have so much energy, time, and not a whole lot of ideas of what to do with my time. What do women recovering from sex addiction do when they stop acting out?

**Signed,
Looking for My Outer Circle**

Dear Looking:

Thanks for sharing. Many of us found when we first came into the program that old interests brought little joy. Nothing really had the same sparkle. In time, with the support of other fellows in SAA, many of us found that making our outer circle flexible was a big game changer. "Outer-circle behaviors encompass a wide range of healthy activities. They are frequently the things we didn't have time to do when we were acting out" (*SAA Green Book* pg. 19).

One reframing of the idea of outer circle activities is that these are actions which allow connection with the world outside of ourselves.

Many of us found physical movement to be really helpful, from dancing in the kitchen, stress cleaning, or practicing yoga. When big feelings manifest, as they do even in long term recovery, moving around helps change the intensity of the very valid emotions.

Another common outer circle action is practicing self-compassion. This could be as simple as eating a healthy meal, taking a shower, getting a

*Statement of Purpose for
Dear Grace: to reach out to
all women with a desire to
stop addictive sexual behavior
through this printed medium
and share with the fellowship
the types of questions the Grace
e-mail (grace@saa-women.org)
receives.*

**Names have been changed to
protect anonymity.*

manicure, journaling, therapy, step work, or anything that creates a space where self-love and self-appreciation help move us to a balanced life.

Some say the opposite of addiction is connection. When we acted out, the root need for some of us was a craving to feel loved, accepted, and seen for our authentic selves. It really helps to reach out to friends—both in and out of the program.

Many fellows starting recovery recognize they have two major social groups: Those who encourage addictive behaviors and their fellows in recovery. If we are the only female-presenting person in our home group, it may not feel organic to hang out with the fellows outside of meetings. However, old friend groups, especially those from when we were acting out, can easily cause us to slide into old patterns and behaviors. Some of us have faced our fears and began

joining local community groups and developing new friends that, to our merriment, are interested in things we are curious about. Through this experience many of us found things we did enjoy.

Another outer circle category that helps is regularly attending meetings and being of service. Service helps us get out of our heads and generates tiny bursts of accomplishments.

Some of us begin to broaden our horizons and help those addicts who are still sick and suffering by volunteering time for ISO committees such as the Women's Outreach Committee (WOC), which allows us to create the type of support system for female-presenting people that we may have desired in our own early recovery.

**In service,
Grace**





Dodging Bullets

BY VINCE V.

I have been sane and sober in recovery for more than five years after coming into the fellowship of SAA. And yet, after all this time, recently I was struck yet again by another vestige of my former acting out days—a series of very powerful and overwhelming memories.

The events took place over a few years before I came into recovery. They involved a series of complicated interactions between a former acting-out partner, my wife, and my daughter. All of them met on several occasions, but my family did not know I was acting out with this individual. The details are unimportant, except to note that it involved many close calls between this partner and my family, and my having to dodge many virtual bullets during those insane times.

It all came back in full circle one afternoon. My employer was purchasing a vacant building, so I decided to drive by to see it firsthand on my way home. Later, to my surprise, I discovered that my former acting-out partner used to work at this very facility. The irony of this came as a total shock and hit me like a brick.

In an instant, my mind traveled back through time, like it was yesterday. I was flooded by a series of very vivid memories which had been buried deep within the recesses of my mind. Like a tsunami, they came rushing to the surface all at once. I relived countless moments, felt strong emotions, and saw colorful images, all in glorious color and vivid detail. This incredible power of the mind to recall so much detail never ceases to amaze me.

All the memories were like virtual bullets from my past, flying through time from the past to the present, whizzing by my head, missing me by just a hair. And yet the absolute insanity of everything I used to do hit me all at once, like a slug to the chest. The craziness of my former behaviors boggled my mind—which thankfully is now a place of sanity. In that moment, I could not comprehend my former self.

I asked myself, “What was I thinking back then?” The truth, of course, is I was not thinking at all! My actions had no rhyme or reason. My behaviors reflected the irrational and insane mind of my addict—a person driven by the singular thought of seeking their drug of choice, no matter the cost or risk.

Before I found SAA, I was hopeless, miserable, and not really alive. I merely existed within the dark and lonely prison of my own making. Trapped within those walls, I was isolated and incapable of feeling love, joy, or gratitude. My former life was filled with perpetual lying, hiding, anxiety, and fear—all mixed in with the incessant thoughts, illusive fantasies, overwhelming excitement, and continual thrill of “acting out” again and again.

Today, having worked through the Twelve Steps of SAA and being of service to others as a sponsor, my mind has been restored to sanity. I have discovered my true self, and I know myself and others much better than I ever thought possible. I have had many spiritual awakenings, and I have become a highly spiritual person. I trust the will of my higher power over my own will, and act accordingly.

As the SAA slogan states, I am moving “from shame to grace.” Although I no longer live in shame, I feel guilt and regret over all the things I did while living in my addiction for over forty years. In recovery, I have been humbled and live a life of rigorous honesty. Truth is my guiding light. The truth is that I hurt myself, those I love, and many others. How can I not feel responsible and guilty for all the bad decisions I made and all the harm I caused? I cannot change the past, nor all the consequences of my actions. Instead, I strive to take full responsibility for all my past and present choices and actions. I make daily living amends for any harm that I cause. I live according to spiritual principles and subscribe to the tenet of “first, do no harm” whenever possible.

All the memories were like virtual bullets from my past, flying through time from the past to the present, whizzing by my head, missing me by just a hair.

Today, even if I feel no desire to act out, I admit that I am still an addict, and I always will be. Though I am powerless over my addiction, I have been gifted with a new sense of hope, and the strength and courage to fight for my sanity and sobriety every single day.

Time and time again, recovery has taught me that I can stay sober by maintaining constant contact with my higher power. I do this by staying present, meditating, praying, writing, listening, sharing, and connecting with my brothers and sisters in the fellowship on a regular basis. They are my dearest friends, and I love them and support them like my family. They are always by my side. When I walk with them, I can always stay on the path of recovery. I am grateful for them, and for so many other things.

I am especially grateful for the fact that I no longer have to dodge those deadly bullets that nearly killed me. In fact, I’ve come to realize that all those bullets from my past were never real. They were just illusions created out of the insanity of my sick and addicted mind. Nowadays, those false bullets just fall to the ground and melt away, like the illusive fantasies I used to chase all day long when acting out. I now choose to live in reality and sanity, instead of within a fantasy world riddled with false bullets. ©



First Meeting

BY DL

I am grateful that years of working the Steps in another fellowship paid off in a way I didn't expect. It gave me the self-awareness, honesty, and courage to see that I had become powerless to control my own sexual behavior – a lot like my drinking had done years before. In hindsight, I'm grateful for that awful truth. However, at the time, admitting it to myself felt like a demoralizing weight.

I used to go online in the evening for a quick release or at least a distraction. But somehow, “the good times” turned into having to tear myself away hours later when it was already too late at night (or too early in the morning) to get a good night's sleep, showing up for work regularly tired, sometimes late, and occasionally calling in sick just wasn't my best work.

I wasn't the clear-headed, patient, tactful, focused professional they'd hired and I thought I should be. So, guilt or resentment piled up over the day and sent me back online that night, and the next one, and the next. Just like work, it was true, too, for my relationship, health, spending, friendships, and more. And this was just the beginning. Shame, fear, and anger piled up as I stumbled into lots of other ways to feel that sex buzz in the brain—at the expense of everything else in my life.

By the time a friend needed help going to his first twelve-step meeting, I couldn't say no without knowing I should go for my own sake, too. Within a week, we walked into a church attic half-full of sex addicts of various ages – people just like me.

Knowing I belonged there did not make me feel less ashamed. But the opening readings did. They seemed to know what I'd been doing, how hard it was to stop or even to control it, and how I wanted to give up trying. That night, half the room shared how their lives got easier by leaning on each other. How their lives got better by taking the Steps with someone who's been through them already. How they'd let go of trying to control anything outside of their own choices and actions. How they'd become grateful enough that they wanted to get deeper into the Steps today to deal with whatever life threw at them today and the next twenty-four hours.

**Knowing I belonged there
did not make me feel
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Hearing their experience, my shame and hopelessness began to slip away. Instead, I felt proud to be one of these honest, courageous people. Yes, they were sex addicts. But these addicts were putting in the work to heal – to grow into who they really wanted to be. I wanted the insight and acceptance they had gotten from focusing

on this addiction as they walked through the Steps. I wanted the strength they got from leaning on each other between meetings. I wanted the peace they got from knowing they weren't bad people who needed to become good. They were people with an illness working to get well and find grace.

I left the meeting knowing it was not my fault I'm an addict. But I am responsible for what I do about it. Since then, I have tried to listen and share at meetings, be of service, and learn about myself instead of judging others. Every day since then has been better than it would have been, so long as it's a day when I pray for the serenity, courage, and wisdom I was shown at my first SAA meeting. ©



Start with a joke!

BY BRIAN B.

Let's start with a joke.

A guy goes into an ice cream shop and says, "I'd like a cone with two scoops of chocolate, please."

The guy behind the counter says, "So sorry, we just ran out of chocolate, but we have dozens of other flavors. Can I get you something else?"

The customer says, "OK, let me get a cone with one scoop of vanilla and one scoop of chocolate."

The ice cream shop guy says, "No problem with the vanilla, but—again—we're completely out of chocolate... Not even one scoop left".

The customer says, "Oh, well, how about one scoop of strawberry and one scoop of chocolate?"

The ice cream shop guy says with frustration, "You probably didn't hear me the first couple of times... I can get you the vanilla and the strawberry, but we don't have any chocolate!"

The customer says, "OK, ok... Got it! How about some mint chip and chocolate?"

At his wit's end, ice cream shop guy asks, "Can you spell the 'van' in vanilla?"

The customer says, “V-A-N”

“Great! Now, can you spell the ‘straw’ in strawberry?”

“Sure, S-T-R-A-W”

“Wonderful! Now, can you spell the ‘FREAK’ in chocolate?”

The customer thinks about it and says, “Wait, there’s no ‘FREAK’ in chocolate!”

The ice cream shop guy says, “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you!!”

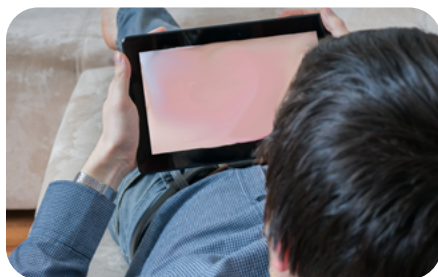
I heard this joke when I was around the age of 12 or 13, and it has stayed with me now for forty years. It’s one of my favorite jokes.

I originally heard this joke on television. More specifically, it was on an adult channel that I used to watch when I was a kid in my bedroom. The channel came on after 8 p.m., and I would watch with the squiggly lines. In between movies, there was a segment called “Funny Shorts,” and that’s where I heard this bit of comedy gold.

If you liked the joke, you might argue that something good came from this adult programming after all. If you didn’t like the joke, well... that’s not the point.

The point is that this channel was the first substance that I used to feed my addiction. That’s not to say that I wasn’t lost in fantasy for years

prior to finding this substance, but this was the “first drink,” so to speak. From this channel with the squiggly lines, I went on to find magazines, books, then videotapes (without the squiggly lines), and eventually the unlimited World Wide Web.



For about thirty years, I found different ways to consume my drug of pornography. Porn was a constant companion for me from age eleven to nearly age forty. Whatever I was up to in life, there it was. Single or in a relationship, in college or work life, moving back home with parents, living on my own, entering my marriage—porn was with me. Always by my side, in its many forms, always ready to step in when problems would arise.

After trying to stop for the 10,000th time, I finally sought help, just over fifteen years ago. I went to meetings, got a sponsor, and started working the steps. In the beginning, I would check in with my sponsor every day. I have no doubt that I was a pain in the butt!

My sponsor and I would talk about the program and life. He challenged me to explore my interests, which I now know as the outer circle. I told him that I wanted more peace in my life, but I didn't know how to get there. He told me to put the addiction down to make room for the interests to grow.

I told him that I was waiting for the interests to grow first, and then I would watch less porn. He told me that I had it backward—passions don't kill the addiction, the addiction kills the passions.

I said that I understood, and then as soon as the conversation was over, I would go right back to my old habits. I just couldn't believe what he was telling me. No porn, ever? No way!

After several slips, my sponsor asked me an important question. "What do you want to do with your life?"

I said what I really want is to feel hope again. "I want to grow spiritually," I said, "become more enlightened, and feel hope. And...I still want to watch a little pornography."

Reaching his frustration limit, my sponsor suggested that I think of a big bowl of ice cream with four different flavors: enlightenment, spirituality, hope, and pornography. Then he asked what flavor I

would try first? I admitted my tastes leaned toward porn.

He said, "Do you see it now? Those flavors can't live in the same bowl for us addicts."

I said, "What about half a scoop of porn?"

He shook his head, "No".

I said, "Maybe a tablespoon?"

He said, "You won't be able to grow and still use. It just doesn't work that way."

I said, "C'mon just a little bit. There just must be a way to have hope and porn!"

He tried another approach. "Let me ask a few questions."

I said, "Uh-oh."

He said, "You'll be fine; these are simple questions."

I said, "OK. I'm ready."

He said, "Can you spell the 'spirit' in spirituality?"

I said, "Sure. It's S-P-I-R-I-T."

"Can you spell the 'light' in enlightenment?"

"Of course. It's L-I-G-H-T."

"Can you spell the hope in pornography?"

I said, "Hmm. No, there is no 'hope' in pornography."

He said, "That's what I'm trying to tell you!" ©

Running On Empty? by Brad W.



When I came into these rooms, I was a weather-beaten carcass of a man – emaciated inside and out, with black holes for eyes. Shorn of hope, gratitude, love, and self-confidence by my own actions, I came to recovery with nothing to offer anyone – but in desperate need of everything.

There was no quadrant of my life unscathed by the chaos of years spent in active addiction. The parts of my life that weren't in ashes were

still burning, and what wasn't burning was just waiting for me to show up, a can of kerosene in one hand and a lit match in the other. I had become “the Destroyer of Worlds,” the villain of my own story, and, worst of all, I knew it. But I felt completely powerless to stop.

What could I give to anyone but disappointment, sorrow, and fear? I had nothing to offer anyone anymore but a thoroughly wrecked life. Or so I thought.

It was at one of my early meetings in another fellowship that a portion of some promises of sobriety caught my attention:

“We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.”

In sex addiction, I had been wanting to shut the door on the past since I was a child. I kept imagining some solemn vow, some grand gesture, some final battle that would end this nightmare once and for all. After that, real life could begin, and I could safely put the insanity behind me.

Obviously, life isn't like that. But this idea really grabbed my attention. In what universe might someone like me not want to forget a depraved and destructive past like mine? What value could any of it possibly have?

After a few meetings, I got my answer to both questions.

What did I have to offer? My life.

I had a lifetime of experience in active addiction to share with other addicts, proving to them that they were neither alone in their struggles nor unique. In fact, I learned that lesson on the receiving end of the bargain. In hearing the stories of others, I heard overlapping elements of my own. I had spent decades believing I was not only a terrible person but totally alone in it all, and uniquely horrible. But, with time, I came to realize that I was never a bad person trying to be good, just a terribly sick person who had no idea how to get well.

Not only that, I wasn't alone. When I first came into the rooms, I couldn't imagine anyone else on Earth being as dark and twisted inside as I was, having hurt others as badly as I had or having ruined their lives as expertly as I had. But, again and again, I heard

parts of my own story from the mouths of others. I was no longer alone, no longer uniquely awful, not awful at all.

From that insight came a kind of peace and in those pockets of peace, I soon found something like self-respect creeping back in. In honesty and vulnerability at meetings, I learned that I could be my whole broken self with others and not only still be accepted but actively loved by them, even knowing everything I had done.

And that answered the second question: Why would I want to shut the door on the past?

First of all, as an addict, I can't afford to forget my past. My whole past, warts and all, was what brought me to recovery. The second I forget any of it is the second I become vulnerable to living that way again. And recovery is nothing short of life and death.

But I also need to remember all of it—as much of it as I can—so I can share my experience, strength, and hope with others. If I had closed the door on everything that led me into recovery, I would truly have had nothing to offer anyone on arrival. When I first realized a few days into recovery that I had something important to offer my fellows—my lived experience in addiction—a warmth washed over me. It was hope of a kind in which I had long since stopped believing. I could be helpful to others. I couldn't remember the last time I truly believed that. I could give as much as I took in this fellowship just by showing up and telling some hard truths about my life.

I belonged somewhere. I had people now. I had community. And just by showing up at meetings and sharing honestly about my life, I could be of service to others. I wasn't as completely empty as I believed

I was when I first showed up. In fact, I had a wealth of experience, then growing strength and most recently, genuine hope to offer!

Once I found how my story could provide hope to others, I found energy and confidence to offer other forms of service. I provided security support at online meetings. I went into breakout rooms with people in distress to help reassure them. I showed up reliably and shared regularly. Most recently, I stopped bellyaching about how there were no in-person SAA meetings in my area, found a helper, and started one. Now, there is an in-person meeting in my area; the only one within a two-hour drive in any direction and the first one to start since 2019. My life and my past – even its worst details – are not only helping others but changing the landscape of life (inside and out).

Armed with growing inner peace through progressively successful times in abstinence by working the steps, I started sharing my lived experience with friends and family outside of my programs. I found that my fear of judgment and rejection by others was often just me projecting self-judgment onto them. So, little by little, I self-disclosed the secret history of me to others in my life from before “rock bottom” and so far, all of them received the news with kindness, empathy, and true friendship.

Fourteen months into recovery, my life is now unrecognizable from before, and it continues to change for the better, even on my hardest days. I was never truly empty inside; it just felt that way. I had simply convinced myself that I was worthless and had nothing to offer anyone else anymore. Although it took me a while to see it, the cup of my real life – the real me – was always overflowing. And I take great solace in the knowledge that, even at the hardest times, it always will be. ☺

DEAR WILL

Shame vs. Grace

BY WILL

*How do we go
from shame to
grace? How can
we translate
this slogan into
action?*

Dear Will,

At the meeting I attend we pass out chips to recognize sobriety. I'm sure you've seen the inscription on these chips that reads "From shame to grace." I get the "shame" part, for sure, as I did a lot of awful things in my addiction, created a lot of chaos, and hurt those closest to me. Right now the "grace" part seems so far out of reach. I feel so much shame, and I don't have the slightest clue what I can do to shake those feelings of shame and get to grace.

Sincerely,
Shamey

Dear Shamey,

I sure remember having those same feelings. In the depths of my addiction, I didn't feel much, so it was almost an upgrade for me to feel something. The shame was pretty tough to stomach, although I know now it was a sign that I was finally breaking through the denial that allowed me to remain imprisoned by my addiction.

I looked up some definitions to see if what I feel to be shame matches up. What I found was that "shame" is "a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior." Well, that sure described what I remembered of my addictions and the damage they caused. I also looked up "grace," and it was defined as "refined movement," which reminded me of the Twelve Steps, the blueprint for full and successful living.

I hadn't put it together, but the steps do teach us how to walk with grace; how to approach our addiction, our recovery, and life in a graceful way. Grace for me spoke to the spiritual sense—a

blessing—and I cannot think of a greater blessing than getting to have a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps and getting to live life free from addiction.

So, how do we go from shame to grace? How can we translate this slogan into action?

For many of us, the first step we took to move from shame to grace was stepping into our first SAA meeting. Shame seems to be so dependent on our internal dialogue that its vice-like grip begins to be broken when we seek to not only join but participate in our community, in the fellowship of other recovering sex addicts. Our book says, “Meeting together regularly to share experience, strength, and hope gives the choice to live a new life.” Shame is part of our old life, the way we behaved, treated others, and thought about ourselves. Shame is all about our past. The act of surrendering and choosing to work on our recovery provides opportunities for us to experience life in the present, one day at a time. I have experienced that, unlike shame, grace is a by-product of getting sober, working my program, and living in the present.

For me, being part of the recovering community, I found SAA helped me

begin my journey from shame to grace, but it didn't complete the journey for me. There were many more steps involved—in fact, there were precisely twelve: the Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous. I have found that the best vehicle for putting distance between me and my shame is sobriety and the Twelve Steps. Working the Steps and learning to live by the spiritual principles they teach played a crucial role of turning my shame into accountability and responsibility, specifically in Steps Eight and Nine. Working the Steps helped me to repair (and sometimes restore) my relationships with others, with my Higher Power, and myself leading to a spiritual transformation and put me in a position where I could accept the gift of grace.

So, if you are finding yourself confused about the phrase from shame to grace or feeling stuck in shame: Keep working the program, keep working the steps, and I trust that you too will experience the spiritual transformation From Shame to Grace.

Will

If you have a question for Will, please send an email to Men4SAA@saa-recovery.org.



STORIES OF SERVICE

Bridging recovery: A global invitation to join the renewal of SAA South Africa

BY LEIGHTON AND
ANTHONY S.

*Our mission
focused on
bridging the
disconnection
within South
Africa and with
the global SAA
community*

Leighton writes...

The first SAA meeting began taking root in South Africa around 2006, initiated by members who sourced literature from the International Service Organization. The earliest SAA support groups sprung up in two of South Africa's nine provinces: the Western Cape Province, notably around the Cape Town area, and the Gauteng Province, primarily in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Over the years, several SAA meeting groups sprang up in various locations within these provinces. Before the pandemic, all meetings were held face-to-face. However, as the pandemic unfolded, meetings transitioned online, with the current format being a mix of face-to-face, online, or hybrid (live & online) across our twenty SAA meetings.

Before the pandemic, an SAA intergroup was specifically established to serve the meetings in Cape Town. We attempted to start a Gauteng province intergroup, but unfortunately, this effort did not endure, although Gauteng maintained its own SAA website at the time. I remember joining SAA in August 2011, when the late Chris S founded what would become my home group, the Northcliff SAA meeting.

Anthony S. writes...

In 2016, I embarked on a personal recovery journey that evolved into a leadership role within SAA South Africa. In the last

year, our countrywide fellowship has focused on addressing the lack of a cohesive nationwide intergroup and establishing a much-needed area assembly. Our mission focused on bridging the disconnection within South Africa and with the global SAA community.

Through our Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community (PI-CPC) outreach committee, we've seen a recent influx of newcomers, revitalizing meetings that previously rarely welcomed new faces. The restructuring of our area, with substantial support from many throughout the global SAA community, has provided us with essential resources and education. This collaborative effort has led to an invigorated fellowship, with long-standing members expressing their amazement and joy at the profound changes.

Stories of Service inspire others to be of service. Send your 250-300-word story to toc@saa-recovery.org.

This journey illuminates a crucial lesson: without a well-structured recovery fellowship and a community committed to service, individual recovery and our collective mission to reach the still-suffering sex addict falters. Our restructuring has reignited hope and recovery, attracting newcomers and demonstrating the profound impact of unity in recovery. By opening our hybrid workshops and retreats to the global SAA community, we not only share our experiences but also encourage a worldwide exchange of ideas and support that could inspire similar renewal efforts across other areas worldwide.

This worldwide exchange begins this year. We're introducing multiple workshops and a retreat in 2024, focusing on the five pillars of recovery. These hybrid events are designed for broad accessibility, encouraging worldwide attendance. The workshops will be free, but the June retreat will have a fee to cover costs. We are especially excited to feature speakers from both South Africa and the international SAA community.

Would you like to learn more? Please visit <https://www.saa-recovery.org.za/events/> or contact us at saa.recovery.za@gmail.com.

FROM THE BOARD

To have an in-person convention —or not

**BY BILL I.
BOARD CHAIR**

*We value your
input. Email the
board at*

board@saa-recovery.org

Historically, the ISO has held an annual international convention to celebrate and share our recovery. Like many of us, my first convention was a wonderful, life-changing event. Six weeks after I walked into the rooms of SAA for the first time, I was stunned by the number of people attending the 2002 San Francisco convention who were enjoying and celebrating happy, joyous, and free lives. I was also moved by the shares I heard at the Saturday night banquet. Those speakers—a man and a woman sharing their experience, strength, and hope—were very inspirational to me and others in the audience. Since then I've attended many conventions, made good friends, and learned important lessons and life skills.

At present, I am a member of the ISO Board of Trustees, and we are charged with acting in a fiscally responsible manner on behalf of the fellowship. From that vantage point, some serious concerns have arisen regarding continuing the in-person conventions.

When considering this issue, it is important to remember that the ISO convenes two different types of large meetings. The first type is the international convention, which is more of a recovery and social event with speakers, workshops, and other recovery activities. The conventions have been held at different venues around North America—

Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Las Vegas, Atlanta, and New York City, to name a few. Typically, the SAA convention has been held over the Memorial Day weekend, and it has been organized by a local convention committee and managed by the the ISO. Any member of the fellowship and invited guests may attend the convention.

The second type of large gathering is the annual meeting of the ISO Conference, which is a business meeting where committees and the office report, and business motions are considered. Area delegates attend these meetings and serve as voting members. Since the nature of the issues considered at the Conference meeting does not require an in-person meeting, the use of a video-conference platform is possible and has been done on recent occasions during the pandemic.

For many years the Conference and convention were held in tandem in the same hotel in the convention city. However, in 2018 the two meetings were separated; the Convention continued to be held typically on Memorial Day weekend hosted by a local group, and the

Conference was held in Houston in October. This split was enacted because, at that time, the ISO executive director and Board felt it would result in cost savings because a long-term contract could be negotiated with a Houston hotel at a discounted price and because ISO office staff would not incur the travel and lodging costs of managing the Conference. Those savings would allow other important initiatives to be pursued, such as outreach.

However, the 2022 and 2023 in-person conventions resulted in significant losses – totaling approximately \$39,000. The reasons for these losses seem to stem from decreased attendance and increased hotel expenses. Losses of this magnitude detract from other important ISO functions, such as publishing SAA literature, maintaining multiple websites, managing the ISO accounting, and handling the day-to-day mail, email, and telephone calls received by the office.

The magnitude of those losses has led to in-depth discussion by the Board about the viability of holding in-person conventions in the future. We are facing the reality that someday we may not be able to justify

ISO NEWS

taking a loss on the conventions, which serve a relatively small number of members. At present, we are committed to holding a joint, in-person Conference and convention in May 22-26, 2025. However beyond 2025 that may not be possible. We might have video-based conventions in the future.

We seek your feedback on this issue, and we hope you'll share your views. Please send your thoughts by email to info@saa-recovery.org.

Canceling the convention is not the preferred outcome. However, we must face the fact that financial resources are limited, and, as your Board, we must make decisions that balance fiscal prudence with what is best for the fellowship at large.

Board Actions

March: Authorized combining Conference and convention in 2025.

April: Approved updated hotel contract for 2025 Conference/convention combination

Granted permission to a member to publish own *TOC/PBR* articles independently.

Connecting with Practitioners and the Public

Resources from the Public Information/Cooperation with the Professional Community (PI/CPC) Committee

An important tool of recovery is SAA literature. It can be instructional as we work the Twelve Steps, or it can be encouraging during times when we feel defeated, demoralized, or disconnected from our program of recovery.

The Public Information-Cooperation with the Professional Community Committee (PI/CPC) has contributed to our literature by writing several pamphlets which can be helpful in our Step Twelve work of carrying the message to other sex addicts. In a previous article (September/October 2023) we described four recently approved pamphlets. In this article we discuss two more recently approved pamphlets and the new CPC Handbook.

The pamphlet “Why is PI/CPC Work Important to Recovery?” explains some of the spiritual benefits we receive when we do PI/CPC work. These spiritual benefits increase our courage, compassion, and surrender—all essential components of our long-term recovery. Beyond these spiritual benefits, doing this work is consistent with our primary purpose—to carry the SAA message to the sex addict who still suffers. You don’t have to have finished all Twelve Steps in order to benefit from doing PI/CPC work.

Some of us may be willing to carry the SAA message but are unsure of how to go about it. In the pamphlet “How we Can Cooperate with the Professional Community” we present an overview of various tools, ideas, and guidance on how we can go about cooperating with different professionals.

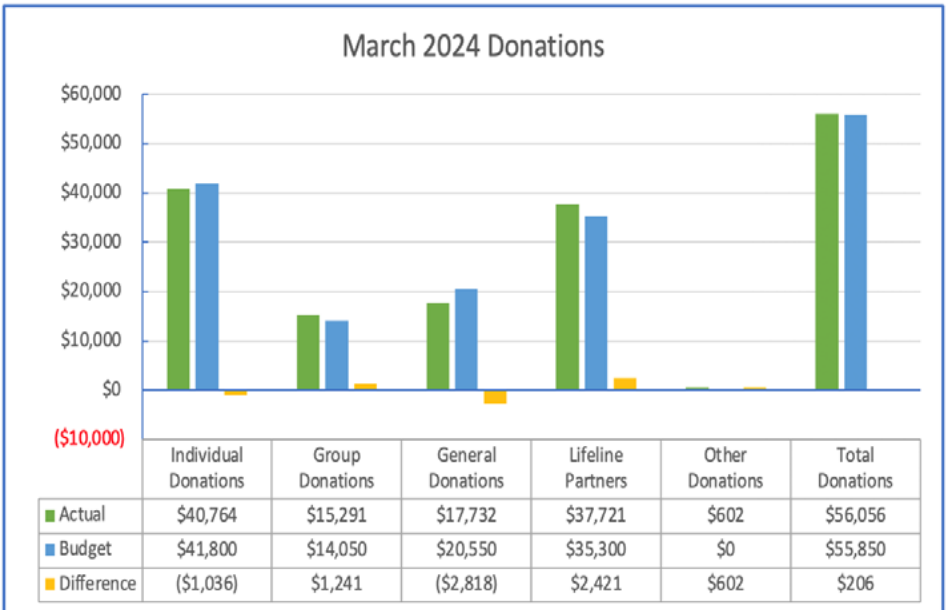
More detailed information on how to connect with the professional community is provided in the new CPC Handbook. For example, one of the most powerful ways we can engage in CPC work is by meeting with professionals who provide services to sex addicts. The CPC Handbook offers tips on finding professionals in our area and making

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

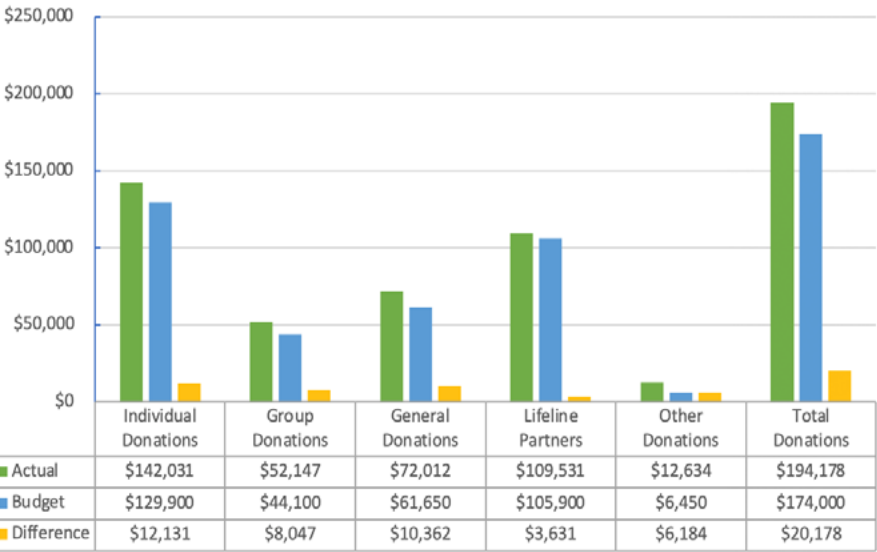
initial contact; suggests what resources to bring to a meeting; recommends discussion points; and suggests what follow-up actions we might take to strengthen the connection with the professional.

Would you like to get involved? These PI-CPC pamphlets and the CPC Handbook can be viewed and downloaded for free at <https://saa-recovery.org/literature/>. The list is at the bottom of the page. Training is also available from the ISO on how to engage in PI/CPC activities, so contact the ISO office for more information.

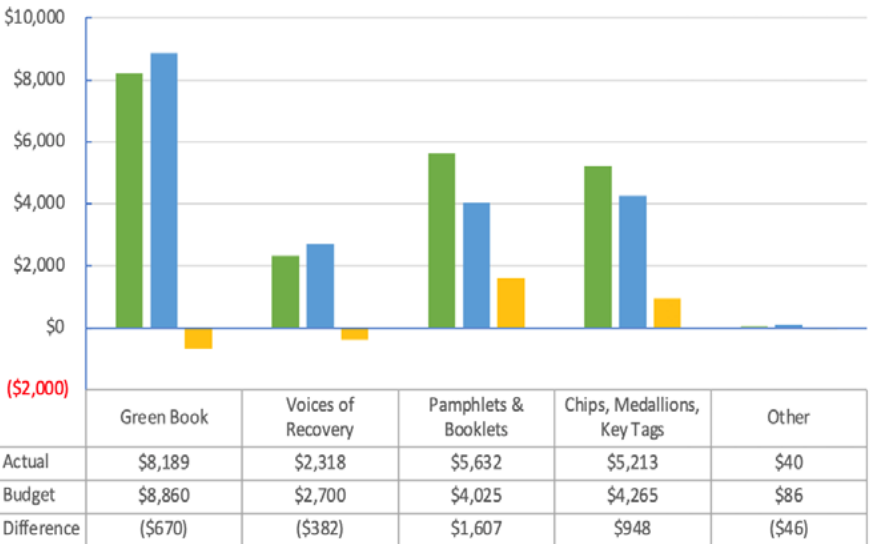
The PI/CPC committee remains busy and there is still important literature to be created. If you would like to help us in our efforts to carry the PI/CPC message, please contact info@saa-recovery.org or +1 713-869-4902 and they can put you in touch with our committee.



2024 YTD Donations (to March)

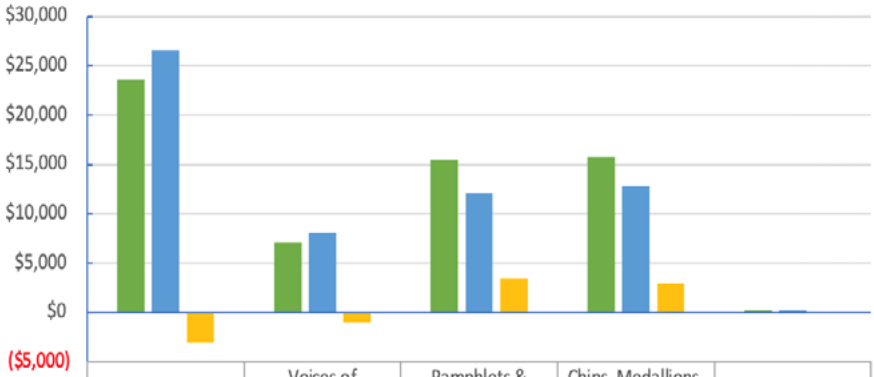


March 2024 Sales



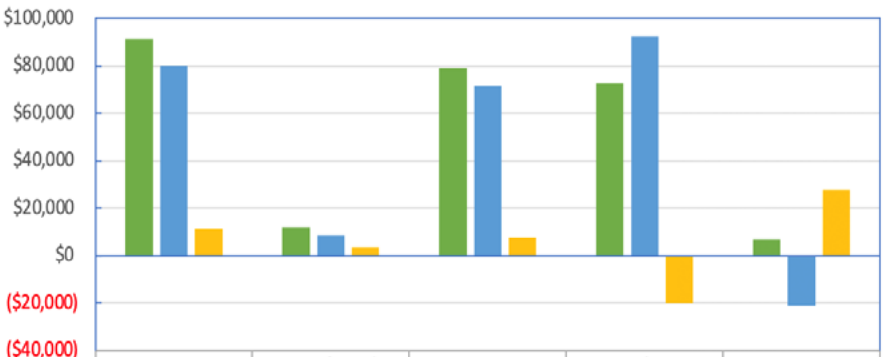
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

2024 YTD Sales (to March)



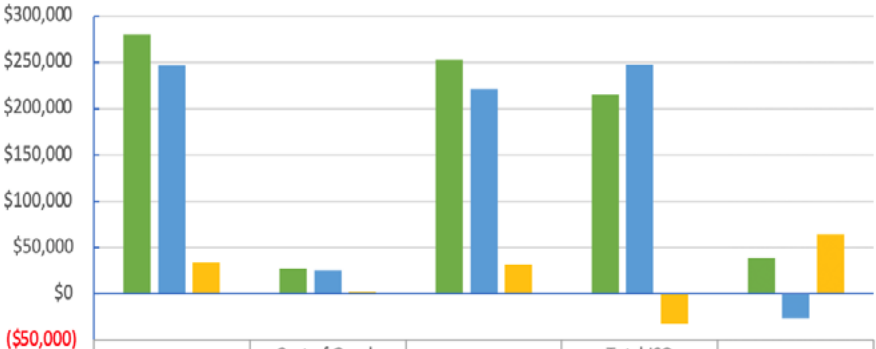
	Green Book	Voices of Recovery	Pamphlets & Booklets	Chips, Medallions, Key Tags	Other
Actual	\$23,579	\$7,082	\$15,478	\$15,724	\$271
Budget	\$26,581	\$8,100	\$12,075	\$12,795	\$258
Difference	(\$3,002)	(\$1,018)	\$3,403	\$2,929	\$13

March 2024 Net Income



	Total Income	Cost of Goods Sold	Gross Income	Total ISO Expenses	Net Income (Loss)
Actual	\$91,194	\$12,002	\$79,192	\$72,444	\$6,747
Budget	\$80,048	\$8,536	\$71,512	\$92,424	(\$20,912)
Difference	\$11,146	\$3,467	\$7,679	(\$19,980)	\$27,659

2024 YTD Net Income (to March)



	Total Income	Cost of Goods Sold	Gross Income	Total ISO Expenses	Net Income (Loss)
■ Actual	\$280,308	\$27,359	\$252,949	\$214,504	\$38,445
■ Budget	\$246,597	\$25,608	\$220,989	\$247,272	(\$26,283)
■ Difference	\$33,711	\$1,752	\$31,959	(\$32,768)	\$64,728

The 2022 audit is complete and posted on the service website (saa-iso.org). Contact the office for login information.

Overall, donations are in alignment with the budget.

Although there has been a significant decline in Green Book Sales, March and year-to-date sales remain aligned with the budget.

Thank you all for your generous support!

Tracy R.
Executive Director

CONTACT THE ISO

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Website: www.saa-recovery.org

The Outer Circle

Editor: Alex B.

The ISO of SAA Board of Trustees also has an e-mail box, which may be used to register comments, positive or negative, from the fellowship about the ISO staff: board@saa-recovery.org.

Board of Trustees and Literature Committee

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Administrative Assistant: Harvey A

LitCom: litcom@saa-recovery.org

Literature Committee

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C; Deb W; Jim P; Juan K; Mike K; Peter L; Ruth
(Chair); Sergio; Stephen P; Zach R.

Calendar

The most up-to-date committee schedule and information about joining any ISO committee can be found at saa-iso.org.

Prisoner Letter Writing Program

Writing and sponsoring prisoners by correspondence continues to be the mainstay of the ISO prisoner outreach program. In addition, the Prisoner Outreach Committee has encouraged members of the fellowship to consider the possibility of starting SAA meetings in a nearby prison. As a result of the pandemic, a new possibility has emerged—namely, meeting by video-conference.

While face-to-face remains the preferred meeting modality in most situations, recent experience in Arizona suggests that meeting by video-conference can open new opportunities to carry the SAA message of recovery into prisons. If interested in learning more—whether you are in the free world or in prison—contact the ISO office by telephone (713-869-4902), email (info@saa-recovery.org), or postal mail (PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270).

PI/CPC (Public Information/Cooperation with the Professional Community)

The Twelfth Step says that, “we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.” At the ISO level, this is done in part through the work of the Public Information/Cooperation with the Professional Community (PI/CPC) committee. If you would like to inform the Twelfth Step at the ISO level, contact PhillipB@saa-iso.net or call the ISO at 713-869-4902.

LifeLine Partners

LifeLine donations provide steady income that allows the ISO to operate and help groups carry the SAA message. Become a LifeLine partner today by calling 713-869-4902 or by going to saa-recovery.org and clicking “Contribute.”

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Get Your Story Published in *The Outer Circle*

The Outer Circle newsletter relies on submissions from the SAA fellowship. Don't worry if you're not a writer. Tell us your story and we'll do the rest. If we have any questions, we'll contact you.

There are three ways to submit your story.

- First, you can submit online at saa-recovery.org/toc. This is the easiest for most people.
- Second, email toc@saa-recovery.org. If possible, include a copy of the release form below.
- Third, mail your submission, with the release form, to ISO of SAA, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.

Requested deadlines and suggested topics are below. Email toc@saa-recovery.org if you have any questions.

Issue	Deadline	Topic
» July/August	» June 1	» Higher Power
» September/October	» August 1	» Pathway to recovery
» November/December	» October 1	» Amends

General Release Form

In consideration of being reviewed for possible publication, I hereby transfer and release to the ISO of SAA, Inc (assignee) all legal rights to the publication of my submission(s) or any edited version thereof in any official ISO publication, including Sex Addicts Anonymous, The Outer Circle, the SAA meditation book, the SAA websites, or any other SAA program material, such as pamphlets, booklets and audio recordings.

With this submission, I transfer to the assignee without limitation the legal title and all literary rights, including copyright and/or trademark and the full right and license to reproduce, copy, edit for content, modify, distribute, and create derivatives from the submitted work. I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard my personal anonymity in the publication and distribution of this material. I also understand that I may or may not receive further communication regarding my submission prior to its publication.

I hereby further attest that I possess full legal capacity to exercise this authorization, and I hereby Release the assignee from any claim whatsoever by me or my successors.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

SAA TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.

The Twelve Traditions of SAA

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon SAA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for SAA membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or SAA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sex addict who still suffers.
6. An SAA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SAA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Sex Addicts Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SAA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Sex Addicts Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SAA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

