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DATE: October 22, 1991
TO: Kim Johnson, Chairperson of the WSB External Committee
FROM: Joe Gossett
RE: International Development Forum

Thank you for your recent invitation to sit in on the October meeting of the external committee of the board of trustees. As I mentioned at that time, I will not be able to attend since this committee meets at the same time as the board of directors. You then asked me to write a paper on my perspective of the international development of NA based on my international nonprofit experience and my observations of NA to date. After reviewing that request with the chairperson of the BOD and sharing a draft of this paper with him, I am happy to provide the following comments.

Sitting in on our first International Development Forum at the last WSC and more recently at the Multinational Development Forum at the World Convention, I saw a number of things that were very familiar. Westerners (especially Americans) have a natural tendency to want to "fix things" for other cultures. If our plans are not fully implemented immediately, we have little patience, poor listening skills, and tend to overreact by withdrawing all support and involvement. Often the overall effect of these actions creates a worse situation than the initial problem addressed. I once visited an orphanage in East Africa designed to accommodate 200 Masai orphaned children. This building had been built at great expense and the staff had been paid for two years. The originating western organization had been so moved by the perception of starving orphans that they had failed to learn that Masai culture consists of large extended family structures that always care for their children regardless of the absence of parents. In two years of operation, this facility had never housed the first orphan. The staff of the orphanage expressed appreciation for the regular paychecks, but could not understand why Americans wanted them to sit in a vacant building when their community had such a desperate need for a school, a hospital, or even a well. Upon learning what they had done, the embarrassed Americans withdrew their support, leaving an African community with an empty monument to American development efforts. I share this story because I believe the act of withdrawing support to be even worse than the failure to do adequate research.

If you don't believe we could ever do anything this far out, imagine this: You live in a non-western culture, you have just joined with a dozen recovering addicts to better understand how to really do these 12 Steps, and you receive a WSC Digest that highlights the differences between the *TWGSS* and the *Guide to Service* and how that could impact our tax negotiations with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Remember the usual western

response is now embarrassment and abandonment. We can do better than that. We can continue to provide our greatest response of experience without promising more than we are capable of delivering and without abandoning the task because we make a mistake.

We cannot build NA fellowships in other countries and we should never imply that we have that power. We can do no more, and should do no less, than sharing our experience. Emerging fellowships could learn much from our successes and even more from our failures.

Before considering different alternatives, we must consider our current and potential staffing capability. Our present financial situation limits our staffing capability to one-fourth of one person to respond to all non-American requests for information. All WSO departments are currently operating with minimal staffing; thus, increasing the priority of international development may not be a practical way to obtain more staff assistance. The appropriate generation of funds to be used to support service activities is a separate topic and will not be addressed in this letter. While considering the alternatives below, we must keep in mind that all policy decisions come with a price tag. We can address the need for planning at this time, but we will not be able to make major changes to the staffing of international development until more resources are available.

Correspondence

Sharing experience through correspondence from the WSO has been a primary method of communication with emerging NA fellowships outside of the United States. Staff responds to requests most often with standardized responses. At present, we do not have the staff resources to generate correspondence to emerging fellowships that have not placed specific requests for information. We also do not have staff resources to staff a committee of trusted servants to provide input into this communication process. When financial resources become available, I believe it would be appropriate to expand our current practice of answering mail to include both initiated mail and trusted servant involvement.

Service Literature

Trusted servants involved in international development could also assist in the creation of service-oriented literature appropriate for emerging fellowships outside of the United States. In western culture, we have found local H&I committees to be an effective way to carry the message; this will not be true everywhere. In western culture, we have found "passing the basket" to have only minimal success in funding our service efforts while literature sales are generally accepted as the appropriate way to generate the majority of our resources. This combination will also not be true in every culture. We must find a balance between appropriate service literature with a universal appeal and personalized sharing for specific situations.

Recovery Literature

We may overemphasize this because it appears to all to be the easiest to provide. We must remember that every NA Fellowship (including the American fellowship) initially

developed without written recovery literature. NA is based on addicts helping addicts and there are no short cuts around that central fact. When an emerging fellowship matures to the level of being able to initiate a translation committee, World Services should be in a position to support that effort. As that fellowship continues to mature, funds will become available to facilitate printing translated recovery literature. Attempting to shield emerging fellowships from these growth experiences can be a disservice.

Personal Interaction

Personal interaction is still an extremely valuable way to share experiences. The risk of making a mistake is highest with this approach, but the opportunity to share experience is also highest with this approach. We should not shy away from this approach because of past mistakes or perceptions of trusted servants on foreign trips. Nothing compares to the benefit of a fellow addict personally sharing their experience in recovery or in service.

In summary, we must remember the following key points:

1. Developed fellowships have both recovery and service experience that is very valuable to emerging fellowships.
2. Sharing that experience in every way possible is really all we can do to help an emerging fellowship. Any other activities to "fix" the challenges faced by emerging fellowships may be counterproductive.
3. Our willingness to fund plans must be equal to our willingness to develop plans.

Our past success and rapid growth have been exceptional compared to any other nonprofit organization in the world. If we maintain realistic expectations focused on our strengths, this success will continue.