

WORKSHOP: THE FUTURE OF ALATEEN

Feedback from the 55th Australian National Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous in Toowoomba 2020

Thank you to the Sponsors and Alateen members who attended this workshop and shared their ideas. The discussion will contribute to conversations regarding the future of Alateen in Australia.

Question One: Looking at online meetings as a way forward – What are the advantages? What are the disadvantages?

Advantages for Alateens

- More Alateens can attend meetings, Australia wide and Internationally
- Meeting members from other States
- Remote connection, cuts down the isolation especially in Queensland with huge areas
- Potential to reach teens when parents are not in the fellowship
- Attending a meeting from your own bedroom, no transport
- No physical restrictions, for example for example wheelchair access
- Easier to organize sponsors for meetings, as a broader range of sponsors are available

Advantages for Sponsors

- Do not have to go out at night
- Save time and inconvenience of physically going somewhere

Disadvantages for Alateens

- At times it is difficult for teens to keep the focus as they are excited about technology, for example use of the chat facility
- Connection problems (internet/software issues)
- No money in the basket – 70% of income comes from basket donations and we can't easily do this on zoom meetings
- Anonymity/privacy may be violated if you are in a house with alcoholics, parents, etc. and you can't find a private space to share
- No physical comfort of being face-to-face
- Unable to do certain Alateen activities (eg. Drawings/writing activities/Alateen board games)
- Not as easy to access certain literature – ordering online, delivery, etc.

Disadvantages for Sponsors

- At face to face meetings it is easier to pick up the vibe if Alateens are upset or do not want to speak

Question Two: What makes an Alateen meeting successful?

- If Alateens are getting what they feel they need
- Sponsors sharing occasionally, for example asking questions such as "Tell me more?" "How did that make you feel?" Are these questions helpful? Ask the Teens.
- Forming close bonds with other members

- Being able to read a broad range of literature (both of the daily readings – red book and blue book)
- Choosing a topic to discuss
- Good participation rate
- Games and activities to break up the readings/sharing's, etc.

Question Three: What contributes to an Alateen group ending?

- Age – too old to be in Alateen and moving on to Al-Anon
- Geographically – members moving locations
- Not enough members attending
- Not enough sponsors
- Lack of Public Information to recruit new members
- Favoritism by Sponsors
- Sponsors being too strict
- Other commitments

Question Four: How to accommodate the age spread i.e. 8-18 years old in meetings?

- Two separate groups
- Breakout rooms for different age groups (also may help with siblings/parent sponsors being in the meeting that feel uncomfortable sharing in front of family members)
- Depends on the participants – sharing is very different for all ages
- A variety in ages is good, 7-20 years, the older 15+ children are more mature and teach the younger children how to embrace and learn the program. It also allows the older teens to empathize, accept and have compassion for the younger teens.
- Virtual meetings cater better for an age range
- Range of activities – games, good week/bad week, sharing's, readings to accommodate for younger members
- Asking specific questions to younger members so they have the chance to share

Question Five: How does the current service structure (groups, districts, areas) support or/and prevent virtual meetings?

In response to Question Five there were no definitive answers, only more questions to contribute to the discussion.

Suggestion: Electronic meetings can register directly with AGSO, to allow all domestic Australian members to access these virtual meetings. Furthermore, meetings should be visible on the WSO site for International members. Due to a small population and Australia's vast geography, it restricts the Alateens by limiting it by State or Area. So much easier to make it National.

- How is the Parent Group/Alateen Group relationship maintained?
- Can the group be supported by an Area or a State?
- Can AGSO support Alateen meetings online?
- Can the Sponsors be based in a group according to Time Zone?

Additional Discussion:

- Teenage years are very tricky, therefore difficult to commit weekly. The teens need a connection/bond, like a physical connection.
- Kids like to hangout after the meeting and get to know each other at physical meetings, which was tricky in a zoom meeting.
- At another meeting, if they finish early, they close the meeting and then open the meeting for conversation until the allocated time, so the teens get to know each other, just asking questions etc. Connection for a chat between members is a good idea as there are new faces and opinions.
- Let the Alateens run their meeting, the younger Alateens are more enthusiastic, which is great for the older teens, very spontaneous! However, the attention span is small for the younger teens. Learn, do, teach.
- Siblings respecting each other in the meeting, is desirable and positive.