

Ways & Means

The Quarterly Magazine for the Fellowship of Debtors Anonymous

Third Quarter 2019

SAYING “YES” TO SERVICE

They say recovery begins when we stop debting. I believe my recovery in D.A. moved to a new level when I learned to say “yes” to service. Keeping my records, not using credit cards—for me, those weren’t the challenges. For me, the hardest part has always been connecting to my fellows. I had felt apart, alone, “terminally unique” for so long; doing service meant I was constantly being challenged to interact with others. It was a painful, exciting, growing

time, the heady early days of service. I wasn’t in D.A. to make friends, but somehow I did anyway. I began to feel part of something bigger than myself, something that had meaning and purpose.

Through service, my recovery had deepened and broadened in ways I never would have thought possible even a few years ago. My attitude is more likely to be serenity than frustration these days. I strive daily to understand what it means to be a servant leader. Every day I

have a chance to connect through service to a Higher Power of my understanding.

I try to do service without any expectations. I have hopes, but I try to steer clear of making my happiness contingent on achieving a certain outcome. I don’t always succeed. Usually it’s after I don’t get my way that I realize how attached I was to a particular agenda. Service is humbling. Service is ripe with opportunities to practice humility.

(continued)



Photo by Greg C., Los Angeles, CA—Prayer in the Ganges

The Ganges River in Varanasi, India, is the holiest place in all of Hinduism. Pilgrims travel from all over to reach enlightenment. The river is used for bathing and cremation, and of course it is used for worship, for praying. I am not a religious person, but it is essentially impossible to not have a spiritual experience in Varanasi. In my case, I arrived shortly after my dearest friend died in a tragic accident. He drowned in a river near Los Angeles. My world was turned inside out; I was emotionally raw, physically alone, and spiritually lost.

I was only a few years into sobriety but the program had taught me how to ask for help. So I did. In a tiny alley a few steps from the Ganges, a wise man told me to go “sit” by the river. “Just sit,” he said, “don’t speak, only breathe.” So I did. I followed direction, and I sat. For days I sat without saying a word. I watched others do the same, and I saw people praying in the river. Praying to a god of their understanding. And so I did.

In D.A., being of service is integral to spiritual growth. As I reflect on this image and my time in the program, I see that being of service to a higher power is of paramount importance. That moment in 2006 in the Ganges allowed me to seek a God of my understanding. I was given the power to carry out his will—to be of service to others. I was also able to be of service to myself. That was enlightening for me; to be of service to myself hadn’t occurred to me. I was awakened.

Through the years, it has become clear that being of service to myself and others is being of service to God. These things flow into one, and for me that has been a deeply spiritual experience. You know, like a river.

SPECIAL ISSUE ON SERVICE

Greetings fellow D.A. members and WSC attendees. The Intergroup Caucus was presented with the opportunity to gather stories related to service in D.A. for *Ways and Means*. As Chair, I had the honor of collecting the stories. That means I was able to get a sneak peak. You are in for a treat. Some are short, some are long, and all are inspiring.

Special thanks to the Intergroup Caucus for requesting these stories from members in their groups, Intergroups, and from across the Fellowship. Service was requested and service was delivered. Three Caucus members submitted their own stories. On a personal level, this was a gratifying service mission. I requested stories from three members in my “neck of the woods”—Minnesota—and was met with “yes” from each one, and all were delivered by the deadline.

At last year’s Conference, a Trustee was handing out buttons that said, “Service is the Secret.” I whole-heartedly agree.

—Chris S., Intergroup Caucus Chair

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A D.A. friend once said, “Service is the pit that sucks you dry.” I laugh whenever I find myself saying it, because it is true that doing service can suck the life out of you if you have an expectation of a specific outcome. Service is an opportunity to practice surrendering all outcomes to God.

Service in D.A. is practical. I learned communication skills by speaking at D.A. workshops; that experience qualified me for the job I enjoy today. Every day I hone my organizational skills. Sometimes I actually accomplish things. I am learning when to speak and when to keep my mouth shut. If those aren’t practical skills, then I’m not a debtor.

I am perplexed by D.A. members who say they are taking a “service moratorium,” or doing 90 days of “task abstinence.” I don’t think I would have survived if it hadn’t been for service. When I was a newcomer, nothing kept me coming back to D.A. except my service commitments. Nothing keeps me connected to D.A. except the service I do today. My recovery depends on my willingness to do service. Even if I totally flub things up, even if I’m not perfect, I still need to show up and offer what service I can “to live usefully and walk humbly under the grace of God.”

I was told early in D.A. to remember to pass it on if I want to keep what I’ve been given. I like the life D.A. has given me. I do service for me, not for you, because I can’t keep my recovery unless I give away to others what I’ve learned. If it helps you and D.A.—wow, that’s wonderful. But I never forget that I need you all a lot more than you need me. That is why I keep saying “yes” to service.

—Anonymous

Ways & Means®

Carrying the
D.A. Message
since 1988

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Submissions from readers on any aspect of D.A. recovery or service are welcome. If chosen, submissions will become the property of the Debtors Anonymous General Service Board and will not be returned. As with all D.A. publications, everyone submitting writing, artwork, or other creative work will be required to sign a standard publishing release form granting rights to the work to D.A. and releasing D.A. from legal liability. Those submitting work to *Ways & Means* automatically acknowledge that they will not receive compensation for their work and that the work may be viewed by an unknown number of readers in unknown locations.

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Grateful Member of D.A.

Being of service in D.A. allows me to give back what I have so generously been given. Before finding recovery in D.A., I had lost hope. I'd always envisioned what work I wanted to do and found or created meaningful employment in alignment with my values and talents. Time and time again, however, debilitating health issues literally leveled me. In one situation I lay on the floor of my office in utter exhaustion with the door closed between clients.

Being someone with tremendous willpower resulted in me trying different work, thinking that switching jobs would be the solution. My last work attempt fulfilled my vision to be paid \$100 per hour. My health again deteriorated and this necessitated cancelling gigs multiple times in a row.

When the reality of my health limitations finally registered, it resulted in "complete and utter demoralization" as is said in program. I'd "hit bottom" with my hopes and dreams. No amount of effort, willpower, or positive visioning was working. This left me with no hope for the future.

Suicidal thoughts flooded my brain and the only antidote I could come up with was to escape into a fantasy world where deprivation didn't exist. For the first time in my life I began binge-buying clothes, jewelry, teacups, shoes, etc., at online stores. This only temporarily distracted me from my miserable life.

Then I found D.A. meetings. At first I poured out my sorrow and problems of mounting debt and limited income at meetings and found solace in sharing. Listening to others in even more difficult financial circumstances brought a sense of identification and ended isolation.

D.A. members provided life-changing service to me in many ways. They welcomed me, reached out by phone to me, and encouraged me to attend one or more meetings per day and to not debt one day at a time. I followed these suggestions and my life began to change for the better.

When D.A. sponsors spoke on my phone meetings I was struck by their calm centeredness and positive outlook. They spoke of "solutions." They had what I wanted. Sponsors shared that the first form of service I could do in D.A. was to not debt, one day at a time. At the time I thought that was strange. How could this be "service?" Now, I understand that you can't give to others what you don't have yourself.

While newly in recovery I began doing service during meetings as a reader and timekeeper. Giving service shifted my focus from self-pity and a sense of deprivation and hopelessness to having a sense of belonging and usefulness again.

When I was in the program longer and meeting and business meeting moderators were needed, I said, "Yes." Through this service I learned how to put

*"D.A. members
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Tradition One of our common unity into practice and to help bring forth the group conscience of our meeting even when there were differing opinions. When committees formed for changing a meeting format, I joined. From this service to the group I learned the joy of working together as a team for a common purpose where all voices were heard.

My D.A. sponsor during this time was guiding me in my recovery, listening to my 12-step work, my daily spending commitments, and financial concerns. Two D.A. sponsors also supported my recovery process by providing me with regular Pressure Relief Meetings. Their clarity and guidance helped me to let go of my old ideas and be open to HP's wisdom.

Where I was once hopeless, my life has now been restored thanks to the Fellowship of D.A. Regardless of what money is or isn't in my bank account, my gratitude for life and sense of worth, wealth, meaning, and purpose remains constant. Through the daily giving and receiving of service as a member of D.A. and by working the Twelve Steps of D.A. I am blessed to be living the Promises of recovery.

—Melissa D., Oak Harbor, Washington



Photo by Erica M., Los Angeles, CA—"The Gift"

One of the most powerful antidotes to my feelings of fear and shame is to feel useful and to feel I've helped someone else. When a sponsee or action buddy or newcomer calls me, they give me such a gift because it is so helpful to my recovery. It allows me to perhaps be a channel for a power greater than myself to express the program principles. I hear things come out of my mouth, and think wow, I should do that too. It also makes me feel more willing to reach out for help myself and to call on others in the program.

I'm so grateful for anything that helps me stay in recovery because part of my disease is to always have one foot out the door or to keep myself small. If I take a call or take on a service position, I'm all in for that moment. For years, I resisted offering to take on the Treasurer position at my home meeting. I worried I might make a mistake or that I couldn't handle the responsibility. It finally dawned on me that I was managing more money of my own than the sum in our group savings and that others in the group might be worried about the same things. I stepped up.

So far I have been Treasurer several times as well as other service commitments. It got me to meetings regularly and gave a sense of accomplishment that helped me tackle more difficult problems in my own finances. Now I make it a practice to say yes to service opportunities.

Service Keeps Me Solvent

Service keeps me solvent. 25 years ago I came into Debtors Anonymous hysterical about the amount of debt which I owed to my family, banks, credit card companies, and stores. I couldn't sleep at night so worried that I would be put into "debtors prison." I was afraid to pick up the phone or open the mail. I ran and ran away from my problems and my feelings.

When I was \$250,000 in debt, I realized my life was unmanageable and there was nowhere else to turn. My sponsor in another program suggested Debtors Anonymous. I identified with the characteristics and felt hope listening to the promises. I started keeping my numbers, going to meetings, and reaching out for help. Slowly and steadily with some slips, I have now been solvent for ten years.

I am the Treasurer of my home group of a small D.A. meeting. I am a General Service Representative in New York and attend the World Service Conferences. I served as Chair of the WSC Hospitals, Institutions, and Prisons Committee. Other service I have done is to help my sponsees work through the 12 Steps, make and take program calls, go regularly to fellowship, have bi-monthly pressure relief meetings for myself, and give PRGs. Most importantly, I am debt free and a witness that this program works.

Even though I have been a member of Debtors Anonymous for 25 years, I still need to practice the principles on a daily basis so that I can remain solvent and spiritually fit. At times I isolate and need to remember that reaching out to another suffering debtor helps me. At other times I feel overwhelmed by service. In addition to D.A., I am active in my spiritual center, in my community, on a non-profit board, and am a business owner. I also am a mother, grandmother, homeowner, and landlord. When I feel the stress of too much service, I reach out to my pressure relief people who remind me that I can say no, that I should put myself first as good D.A. practice, and to have fun.

When I am reminded to get back into joy and balance, then service can proceed from a place of solvency, serenity, and love. Thank you D.A. for allowing me to be of service.

—Seana A., Brooklyn, New York

Connection and Prosperity through Service

After a little time in Debtors Anonymous, I thought I understood why our fellowship in Houston—the 4th largest city in the U.S.—hadn't grown very much since coming to Houston in 1989. From what I could see—my scarcity perspective—we didn't have much of a service culture. This is not to say that my own sponsor and some of the members from the 1990s hadn't done their part years before I came into the program in 2005. Of course they had—we still had our few meetings and an Intergroup and these folks are still giving service. We'd even had a Trustee on the General Service Board in the past. All I know is that at some point it became very clear to me that it was now my turn to give service.

I hadn't felt connected to Debtors Anonymous until the first time I chaired my Tuesday Prosperity Group for a month. And this was a couple of years after attending the meeting once a week, working the Steps with my sponsor, making and doing my best to live in my spending plans, using some of the Tools, and sponsoring others. Over time I started participating in some group and Intergroup business meetings and service opportunities. I started feeling more connected. In 2010 I changed to a job with better benefits. I started saving and then making more money. In 2012 I became

the group's Treasurer for two years, which really helped me in my own record-keeping and spending plans. Then, from 2014-2016 I was the GSR for the group and got to go to two World Service Conferences. That's where I saw the culture of service in action far beyond what I was seeing at home. I served on committees and a caucus and was connected to the program beyond Houston. I saw prosperous recovery modeled.

Two years ago I took a part-time job where I earn more money than I've ever made in my life. I'm serving my second year as the Intergroup Chair. Preparing for and participating in our monthly calls really doesn't take as much time as I made up that it would. It helps me stay connected to the five groups and members I don't see at my Tuesday meeting.

At the end of this year I plan to stand for the Intergroup Treasurer position. I may or may not be retiring later this year as my part-time job winds down and I turn 65. I'll be living on a more fixed income while I wait to see what next God has planned for me. I could never have even considered retirement if not for our program. I have to trust that others will step up to fill vacant service positions in our groups and Intergroups and I believe this is the only way Debtors Anonymous and our members will grow and prosper as a Fellowship.

I'm willing to stay involved—not only as my expression of gratitude for what I've received but also as a way to stay connected and sane around money. I got here because of the First Step, and I stay for the Twelfth Step's spiritual awakening and the Promises that have come true in my life so far as the result. I need and want to serve Debtors Anonymous members and carry the message of recovery to the still-suffering debtor. I need and want to keep a beginner's mind as I go about rotating through service positions. I need and want to stay connected and participate in the growth and prosperity of our Fellowship. I'm doing my part and leaving the results up to HP.

—Sara H., Houston, Texas

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Giving Service Helped Me to Take Care of Myself

I walked into 12-step meetings in the 1980s. I first went to D.A. in 2003, realizing I needed help with my debting addiction but I left because I thought I could work the D.A. principles just by working the Twelve Steps by myself without the help of the D.A. Fellowship. I completely forgot that I did not work the other programs by myself. Members of my other fellowships were there giving service and showing me how to work each program.

Yet as I look back I think I wasn't ready to deal with my debting issue. It's funny how fear can take over. Not dealing with my addiction to debting, I had become a slave to vagueness. Complacency was starting to seep into all my programs. I debted to fill the void; I had to have xyz. Any excuse would do for debting. I lived in vagueness, and anything that would stop me from feeling the feelings was my panacea. I kidded myself into thinking since I was abstinent in my other programs what did it matter if I used a credit card.

As time passed I got more concerned about my financial debt. In 2012 I realized that my husband would not be able to retire because of how much debt we were in. It wasn't until I walked back into the doors of Debtors Anonymous and honestly took the first step of D.A. that I truly began to take the actions necessary to trust in my Higher Power. When I did my first Pressure Relief Group I asked my husband if he would come with me. He also started coming to meetings with me. I no longer have to hide my debting, and our relationship improved.

I got a D.A. sponsor and started doing service work. However I was stepping on people's toes. I thought I knew a better way of running the meetings. I was pretty much a control freak, yet my home group gently let me know I was being too pushy. I made amends to my group and started to really realize the full implications

of "This is a We program," and everyone needs to do service. There was a member at my meeting whom I asked to become my service sponsor, and having a service sponsor truly helped. I needed to learn how to be of service without thinking I have to do everything. I am so grateful for the Debtors Anonymous program, which finally helped me to look at all my issues and start to truly deal with my recovery process.

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Photo by Jill I., Los Angeles, CA—Street art in London

Service. I heard about service when I first came to program and wanted no part of it. I only wanted to learn how to get out of my own pain and prosper.

When people suggested that I take a commitment or sponsor someone, I always heard the phrase "be of service" as punitive. How is that supposed to help me?

The unique thing about service is that I do it anyway, sometimes begrudgingly, and like a muscle my willingness to be of service grows. Every service commitment has taught me to grow in ways that make more service possible. I've learned to value relationships. When I trust that God has a plan for me and is my employer, my surrender is an act of service. The joy I have gotten out of being of service became a way of being, then a fulfilling livelihood emerged.

This picture was taken in London on a recent trip I took while being of service. It reminds me of the diverse populations I'm fortunate to serve. I was asked to speak at a university about health and wellness in homeless communities at a global conference. Without program and progress in my own recovery, I would not have been in a position to serve at this level. Being a channel and letting God use me as a message offers health and wellness in communities. I'm blessed and grateful today and know what a treasure being of service truly is.

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The Promises of the D.A. program are happening for me. Through doing service I have strengthened my own program. I get so much from those I sponsor; giving PRGs helps me to better understand my fellow members and also gives me insight into how I might need to tweak my own program. In 2014 my husband and I went to the World Service conference in Chicago as volunteers and I realized that I wanted to give back what Debtors Anonymous had given me. In 2016 I went to the WSC as a GSR and my husband, who is now retired, went with me as a volunteer. These past three years of being of service to the World Service Conference and in turn to my home group have been

very special.

My sponsors in all my programs noticed my health issues were making it harder for me to be of maximum service and suggested that I needed to step down and take time to heal. I kicked and screamed, they were patient with me, and now it's time to let someone else be of service above the group level. God will direct me to what type of service He wants me to do as I begin my healing process. Who knew that stepping down was also doing service? My teammates on my Committee and Caucus have let me know that I need to take care of myself and that stepping down from service is also allowing others to give service.

—Marysia H., St. Louis, Missouri

Pressure Relief Groups

One of the best experiences I have in D.A. is doing PRGs for others. The main reason is that it gets me out of my head. I get to show up for others who share their celebrations, pressures, and willingness to do action steps.

When I'm involved in someone else's D.A. situation, I am not thinking of myself. Release from the "bondage of self" is a beautiful thing indeed. I heard a recovery speaker say once, "If selfishness is the root of my problem, then *selflessness* is the root of my solution."

I always feel stronger and better after doing a PRG for someone else. It's like taking out a little more insurance for my D.A. recovery. Plus I get the satisfaction of giving away what others have so generously given to me.

I also get to practice patience, cooperation, acceptance, courage, and other principles doing PRGs for others. This relates to how I interact with the other PRG partner and the PRG recipient. This is especially true if the person I'm doing the PRG for is new because then I'm called on to "meet them where they're at." That requires speaking slowly and carefully so that I don't overwhelm someone or dominate the conversation. I've learned along the way that forcing my opinion on anyone or talking too much creates spiritual pain for me and undermines the other person's ability to get help. So doing PRGs for others is an exercise in humility.

I feel a sense of integrity after I've done a PRG for

someone else. I feel like I'm "pulling my weight" as a member of D.A. It feels adult. It feels mature. It feels responsible. And I feel like a contributing member of this Fellowship.

—Jo M.

Service Has Anchored Me

D.A. service has anchored me in giving back what was shared with me. Some of my favorite acts of service are sitting on Pressure Relief Groups (PRGs) and chairing meetings. Service invariably comes back multiplied when I see the vulnerability and willingness of members honestly sharing what pressures are affecting their lives. I often leave a PRG learning how much I have in common with my fellow trudgers.

When I give service, I am extending the hand of D.A. offering my experience, strength, and hope that "perhaps there is a better way." When I share steps I've taken since arriving in D.A., I am reminded how long my Higher Power has accompanied me and brought me through new experiences and out the other side.

Service keeps me in action and out of isolation—a gift in itself. I know I can make a difference. When I share the love and gratitude I give out, it returns to me seemingly multiplied. It's a marvelous axiom.

In my life service is not the best kept secret—it's a solution I've tried with successful results. I keep coming back for more.

—Gerry L., Golden, Colorado

Facing Fears through Service

Deciding to join D.A. and commit to attending meetings was one of the hardest but best decisions of my life. I decided to not miss a meeting unless I was sick or out of town. I was afraid of money, people, and conflict. When our group business meetings became intense, I was too afraid to speak. I kept coming back no matter what though. I was determined to step out of both fear and “under-being” that caused my underearning and debting. Attending D.A. meetings regularly gave me an opportunity to see how members doing service in D.A. at the group, Intergroup, and WSC levels had a more upgraded program experience and less fear than me.

I first dipped my toe into service unofficially. I often arrived at my meeting early and decided to set up the literature and/or chairs. These tender action steps were a humble beginning. Later, I officially signed up for the literature position. This gave me a new focus: contributing instead of focusing on my fears and wanting to hide. Gentle conversations about literature connected me to other members. Gradually I could ask for a PRG and was being asked to participate in PRGs. Learning to hold a space for recovery within a PRG gradually transformed my fearful voice into one that easily dialogued about experience, strength, and visions.

When our Intergroup needed a Secretary, I felt a nudge from HP. Although I had been in the program at least a year, being Intergroup Secretary did not require me to have a vast experience in D.A. Sitting in Intergroup meetings, listening, and recording the important topic and decisions provided another positive focus for my mind. Again some discussions got heated and I could feel my fear rise, but I knew my purpose was to record the outcome to share with our D.A. community. I learned so much about myself—how to sit with others having feelings and how the D.A. program works to meet the needs and visions of our D.A. community.

Intergroup workshops were the arena of my next big step into service. A fellow member saw my “gifts” and believed sharing them at the workshop could support our D.A. community. This challenged my fear and under-being habits, but I was committed and supported enough by my sponsor and the D.A. members on the

workshop committee to walk through it. Preparing for my workshop presentation steered my usual negative thinking into useful reflections about my experience, strength, and hope in moving from debting to living a solvent life.

Assisting with more workshops, a retreat, and other Intergroup service positions opened me to D.A. members outside of my group, new skillsets, and leadership opportunities that translated directly to leading my visions into reality. One core element of healing that service provided was busting up my sense of isolation. Fear of being me melted away and my authentic voice emerged. This directly translated to my work life.

I learned how to advocate for myself and got a big salary increase. I was promoted to being a supervisor and recently found myself standing calm and trusting my HP while the president of my company was very upset about an IT issue in my department. The experience, tools, and support of D.A. made that possible. I remained focused on how to move toward a solution—thanks to all those D.A. meetings—without getting distracted by the intense feelings of powerlessness that he was feeling. He was so grateful for my calm leadership that he paid for a dinner out for my husband and me.

I keep choosing service now because it is fun, and I enjoy my fellow D.A. members. After five years I volunteered to be the Intergroup Treasurer who reports on the funds. I am not an Excel person but enjoy a good relationship with a fellow D.A.er who is. I wanted to learn Excel for my personal use to keep better records and move away from paper methods. I won't deny that I struggled, but with her support I did learn and now have my spending plan on the computer without feeling intimidated. D.A. service in this way uncovered that I can learn many things that I thought I could not because my fear was locking up my brain.

Service is truly a powerful path back to trust and being your authentic self in the world through action. I am filled with gratitude for D.A. and all the D.A. members that walk with me. Without my fear and under-being dictating the terms of my life, serenity and abundance have followed.

—Helen M., St. Paul, Minnesota

Wealth of Fellowship

I have been a GSR for my home group for just under one year. I like being of service because it helps me feel connected. I enjoy a wealth of fellowship from the program, especially my home group. Sometimes I feel unworthy of serving.

I received an outreach call from a female D.A. fellow in my home group, a fairly large meeting in Los Angeles. She told me she was being harassed by an individual who was showing up at some of her meetings. She went on to explain in detail about several situations that sounded inappropriate. Some of the issues, though not all, had to do with extended hugging. Though no physical harm had come to her, she felt the need to say something to someone.

As part of my own recovery I have been working on my Steps. I'm on my Sixth Step, having compiled a lengthy list of defects from my Fourth Step inventory. One of the defects I am getting ready to ask my higher power to remove is a feeling that I am not strong enough to ever stand up for anyone. If a bully came up to a person next to me I would want to hide, also being glad that I was not the one being picked on. If I spoke up they might pick on me next and I did not feel strong enough to face that.

When this outreach call came to me, it was at the very time I was wrestling with this issue. There was a part of me that wanted to hide. Bringing this issue up at our group was not an easy thing to do, not for me. I was scared to talk about the issue. I was scared to bring it up in this large group. I was afraid on many different levels. But I also believe that every member of our group should feel safe. I also did not want to scare newcomers away by overreacting.

One of my responsibilities as GSR is to run the monthly business meetings. We pass a lot of motions in our group, which is great because we really utilize the parliamentary procedure we have been given to make a lot of improvements in our meeting format. Seeing that procedure in action at Intergroup level and the World Service Conference made it all the more powerful for me. Maybe it's the group conscience in action as we let a loving higher power lead the way.

As a servant of the group that has been a major part of my recovery, I knew that I had to work with my D.A. fellow and do whatever I could within the scope of my GSR position in any way that might benefit her and the group as a whole. Sexual harassment is such a delicate issue and though I felt something had to be done, I asked my D.A. fellow what she would like to do and how could I be of service. We came up with a motion to add a brief statement to our script explicitly stating hugging is optional, not mandatory, or something to that effect. I don't know how other 12-step groups have dealt with this issue. I know some have developed literature. I know that the DA-GSB was working on it. I did not know the right way to handle this for our particular group situation. Once I decided to take this on I really wanted to do it in a way that would help and also be beneficial to the entire group.

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Painting by Roger—"From Mount Hollywood, Looking East"

The painting is something I did from a photo that I took from the peak of one of our local mountains. This scene is looking down on one of the trails, one of the many uphill climbs that we have to make to overcome some of life's problems.

To me, mountains and hiking trails represent the uphill paths in life. This is a view from the top, which represents having made the journey, looking back.

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That's because these days I have some recovery. I am working my Steps and feel the serenity. I have tools, a program, fellowship, and people to reach out to—if I am just willing. There is the “Me Too” movement and people are standing up for themselves and their beliefs. With everything going on in the world and in my life, this defect—based in fear—is keeping me from being of service and doing my higher power's will. There is my D.A. fellow and friend. She had found her courage by speaking up and saying she did not have to stand for that. I thought of that and being of service.

The actual motion took over five months to pass. Once the topic had been brought up at a business meeting many people had serious concerns about having this statement included, and if we did the wording had to be just right. We had to table the motion many times. Between those business meetings I made outreach calls, brought it up at the World Service Conference, sought the sage advise of a Board member, brought it up at GSR meetings, Intergroup meetings, and more outreach calls. I asked my higher power for guidance knowing, with some doubt, that the answers would appear. In the end we passed a simple motion that we add the following phrase to our meeting script: “Hugging or holding hands is not mandatory. Consider asking first.” It passed with a full house of people voting “yay” and only one “nay.”

Somehow I found my strength. At each regular meeting while the motion was still under consideration I vowed to continue to make an announcement that “hugging or hand-holding is not mandatory.”

Our D.A. fellow who came to me has since continued to show up at meetings and shares regularly. She feels safe, partly because she had the courage to come forward and partly because she was heard and not dismissed. I felt like I did not back down from a friend being bullied and yet did not overreact either, keeping the response measured and proportional. I used the D.A. tools I have learned to work within the Traditions to help heal my own recovery and in so doing helped keep the unity of D.A. membership a safe place for all.

—Roger, Los Angeles, California

Note: Recently the D.A. General Service Board published “D.A. Guidelines for Safety in Meetings and Service” on the world D.A. website at debtorsanonymous.org/resources

The Time for Service

I can't imagine what would have happened to me if I had never found and attended my first D.A. meeting in August of 2004. I was already telling family members that I could understand how people killed themselves over money issues (although I promised that I wasn't planning to do the same). I was forcing myself to lie down in a dark room for an hour every day and just *stop* because I felt if I didn't, I might have a heart attack. All that was over stress due to money issues. I was filled with desperation. Luckily I also had willingness. Because two long-time D.A. recovering members took the time to help me in the beginning, and because there are face-to-face meetings in my area, and because I was willing to ask for help, I began my miraculous road to recovery!

Shortly after I started my recovery, I realized that I needed to do some kind of service and I began volunteering to chair or lead the meetings. Then I took some service positions such as group Treasurer and Literature Chair. And after a few years, I decided to try being of service as an Intergroup Service Representative (ISR). I am now reaching the end of my three year service commitment, and I cannot stress how much this experience has helped me in my growth and recovery.

Going to the World Service Conference three times has put me in touch with members who are deep in recovery and committed to the goal of the Twelve Steps: to help those who are still suffering. And there are *many* who are still suffering! I have noticed that in this 12-step organization so many members, new and veteran, say that they don't have time to do service. They are so frantically busy trying to redirect their own complex lives, they don't have energy or hours for any more work. To all who feel this way, here is my answer: you are *so* mistaken. The fact is that you don't have time *not* to do service. The magic of this program is that when it comes to time, when I am willing to do service there seems to be *more* time, actually! Time opens up, and I am able to do everything on my list, including my service commitments.

If you have been putting off taking a service position, I urge you to do it. Your own recovery depends on it.

—Marcy, Houston, Texas

Accepting Service

I first went to D.A. in 1982 in Boston. I moved to New York in 1998 and attended meetings very frequently until 2007 when I moved to Staten Island, which has no D.A. presence. I'm now back almost a year and just had my second PRG for this round of attending. But I was "out" for about 8 years—I don't recommend it.

In the past I had long-term solvency, a sponsor and sponsees, an action group, and many D.A. friends with whom I socialized. I loved giving PRGs, honing in on a debtor's blocks, thinking what would free them, making (mostly good) suggested actions. I was the Treasurer of the "Friday Night 12 W 12" meeting for people with businesses—over 100 people. I felt I had something to give.

Service Surprise

I have had problems with control and codependent debting and spending my whole adult life—thinking I can control a situation and fix other people by throwing money at their problems while not examining my own life. D.A. has shown me that I don't keep the world spinning on its axis, and I can trust there is a Power greater than myself to do so—that service does not entail doing for someone what they can do for themselves. Sometimes service is having someone do for *me* what I can't do for myself. This was reinforced for me recently when I had a total left shoulder replacement surgery.

Six years ago I had surgery on my right shoulder and was overwhelmed with fear anticipating the pain. My daughter stayed with me for a week. I took pain drugs every four hours for a month afterwards, had trouble getting off them, and lost my abstinence in another program. This time I felt I knew what to expect. I was forewarned about the pain drugs. It was my non-dominant left shoulder, not my right; I felt I could do this on my own! People asked what I needed this time: Nothing. I was prepared. I filled my refrigerator with food for the three weeks I anticipated that I wouldn't be able to drive. I was set!

Then I spoke with a good program friend who is a nurse. She was worried about me. She told me I had to have help. Then she explained to me I needed help *not*

But this time around, my Pressure Relief Group advised not doing too much service—to learn to receive instead of give.

I've responded by getting the numbers of a few old-timers, some of whom I've known since 1998. I "sort of" sponsor several of my acquaintances. This is often mutual, but I need to be the "baby"—in my family I was always the one to offer help; that was my "job." So I'm comfortable with that more than I should be.

When I saw that I had enough solvent time and two PRGs, I said to myself, "Wow. Now I can sponsor!" But I'm going to hold back until I get more help myself.

For today I want to become the "helpee" not the "helper." This is a huge action for me.

—Jane B., New York

for me, but for my friends who had asked to help. I had to allow them to do this service for me. I am a helper, a fixer. When someone needs help, I'm the first to raise my hand. Now these people wanted to pay me back. Why would I not help *them* to help me? Especially when I could really use the help? It would be doing a service for them to allow them to help me.

So I started asking people to pray for me. I called the friends who offered to stay overnight when I came home from the hospital. Thank goodness a friend was there when I had a problem with my pain medication IV coming undone at 12:30 in the morning the first night I was home! And thank goodness for the woman who came to my house to help me change my sheets—not easy to do with one arm! And all the people who came to take me to lunch, to the store, and brought me dinner, and folded my laundry, and took me to the doctor. For ten days after my surgery there were different people every day at my home. They were grateful to help me, and I was *so* grateful to have them.

This was one of the most spiritual experiences of my life. I have felt virtually no pain, only soreness. I have been taking only aspirin after the first week. I have felt the positive energy from people who have kept me in their thoughts and prayers, and this has buoyed up my attitude and my spirit. I know now more than ever that in all things, especially service, we are not meant to do this alone.

—Sarah V., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

What's the Secret Sauce in Your Recipe for D.A. Recovery?

“What are your top five reasons for not wanting to do service?” The workshop leader posed that question when I attended a workshop that the Minnesota D.A. Intergroup put on a few years ago. I wrote the following answers down on the handout:

1. I'm too busy
2. I've already done more than my fair share.
3. I have too many other obligations.
4. I need to focus on my career.
5. It would make more sense to do something that earns money.

As participants shared their reasons, I added even more reasons to my list. What the presenter said after we'd shared was this: “In all of those reasons, our Higher Power is *not* present.” Excuses come from a place of self-centered ego and fear. They come from a debting mind.

When debting, my perception is one of lack. I don't have enough—clothes, jewelry, shoes, food, home furnishings, tuition money, books, you name it—so I must get someone else to buy them for me, go out and buy them with money I don't have, use a credit card, or take out a loan. My mind says, “I need X in order to be happy, to be loved, to be fulfilled, to be as good as the Joneses.” But even after buying X I usually don't feel loved, happy, fulfilled, or as good as the neighbors.

The opposite is true when I show up and do service. If I were writing a recipe for making progress in your D.A. program, I'd tell you that the secret sauce is service! The first time I chaired a D.A. meeting, despite my fear of failure, I was reminded that I have a talent for facilitating groups. That was years ago when I was new to D.A., recently divorced, unemployed, and feeling completely incapable of earning a living. Doing service gave me feedback on my own talents. I was reminded that I do have skills, even ones I might use at a job. I could see myself in a new light, and I felt happy.

I've done D.A. service in a variety of ways. I've gone to meetings weekly. I've always had a sponsor and been a sponsor. I've spoken at Intergroup workshops. I've served as Chair of the Minnesota D.A. Intergroup. I co-chaired the Fellowship Day Subcommittee for the World Service Conference held last year in Minneapolis. I've found service jobs to do in D.A. that I like, that I'm

good at, and that give me feedback about my skills, my character, and my recovery. It's not always an upward movement. My character defects can get triggered when I'm doing service as easily as they do in my relationships. At Fellowship Day last year the Conference was being taped, and the “global mute button” wasn't activated. I saw my character defect of control in full force. I kept interrupting the speakers in the room while attempting to get members who'd called in remotely to mute their phones. It wasn't pretty!

When I try to press my opinions on other committee members without taking into account the well-being of the whole group, my shortcomings are in play. Instances such as these used to make me crazy. I'd spend hours beating up on myself. Today they give me the opportunity to renew my stepwork, engage with my sponsor, surrender to my Higher Power, and once again engage in service work. I don't have to be perfect. In fact, I never will be. However, I can be happy and content. I can add the secret sauce of service to my recovery knowing that my best is good enough.

— Mary B., Apple Valley, Minnesota

IMPORTANT LINKS

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/enews

Sign up for special announcements from D.A.

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/announcements

Download single-page flyers to share at meetings.

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/register

Register your meeting annually with the D.A. office.

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/contribute

Contribute to D.A. as a member and as a meeting to help publish literature and support D.A..

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/podcasts

Listen to free audio recordings of speaker shares.

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/ebooks

Buy print and digital copies of D.A. books online.

www.DebtorsAnonymous.org/wsc

Read past World Service Conference reports and learn about service at the World Level of D.A.

Working Through Resentments by Doing Service

One of the most vivid memories I have about giving service in D.A. was as a relative newcomer at my home group in St. Paul, Minnesota. My sponsor told me to take on a service role and (thanks, HP!) I did that, becoming the group's trusted servant—Secretary and then Treasurer. I facilitated the meeting, took the minutes at the business meetings, and did the Treasurer duties. My service work kept me connected to my program, connected to the Fellowship, and kept me out of the isolation that comes with an addiction to vagueness and unsecured debt. I gained confidence doing my service work, and I felt like I was part of something bigger than myself.

All the while I was working the Steps and confronting my own character defects. While I was plugging along working my program and doing my service work, I realize now that I was somewhat missing the point of service. My thought was, "We do service work to get the group's work done." Actually, that's only part of why we do service. We perform service so we can be in fellowship with other people, so we can develop patience and tolerance, learn to respect others, and let go of outcomes. In doing service oftentimes we discover skills we didn't know we had. Service is an official tool of D.A.—one that aids us in our recovery.

When the call for service was made at the end of the meeting and if no hands went up, I felt resentment that others were not "doing their fair share." Strong emotions would come up. I thought, "Why do I keep volunteering for things and other people sit there and do nothing?"

With my sponsor, I confronted my character defects by doing a Step Four. It was painful and humbling. Specifically I had the thought that the world is fair—it is not. I thought, "Everyone has time for service right now." Not everyone has time. I thought, "Everybody can try something new that they have never done before." Not everyone can yet. By working on my resentments with my sponsor, I was able to identify my character defect of self-righteous fear. I thought, "If I don't do it or if it's not done my way, the group will fall apart!" I look back on this now and realize how silly that thinking is. The group always managed on the amount of service being given. I was able to address other resentments I had with other people in my life—coworkers and family especially. My character defects were causing my unhappiness.

The thing that got me into service was a push from my sponsor and a desire to "get things done." What keeps me in service today is a desire to have financial clarity and to have the best possible relationships with everyone I know. I do service to help the newcomer because someone was there for me when I first walked into the rooms of D.A.

Doing service at the personal, group, regional, and World Service levels is a Tool of the program that serves me. A secondary benefit is that my efforts can help other D.A. members and the still-suffering debtor. Service helps me to grow and is a tremendous gift of this program!

—Stephanie R., Edina, Minnesota



In 2020 the World Service Conference will be held in the New York City area. The Host Committee is busy working on the venue and date. Check out danyc.org for updates and email Maureen at wsc2020@danyc.org to volunteer or ask questions. We need your help!!

Meetings as Service

Planning a recent vacation abroad, I looked on our website and found a D.A. meeting that I could conveniently attend during my visit.

I had the foreign currency bus fare for the round trip, the address of the meeting place, and plenty of time to get there. It was exciting to be off by myself on my quest away from my tour group seeing the city as a normal citizen. I arrived at the church where the meeting was to be held and was greeted outside by a gentleman who said I “looked like” I was looking for a meeting. I attended the meeting sharing a bit of my own story. Bringing news of the recent World Service Conference, as well as the Committee and Caucus I served on, I felt my attendance and sharing were contributions to the meeting. We discussed the difficulty of getting literature from outside the US

(where shipping costs more than double the price of a book or pamphlet) as well as absorbing additional fees from converting foreign currency to US dollars. I was able to refer them to the GSB International Committee. Now having our literature available as e-books on Kindle and through print-on-demand is cost-effective.

I’ve always heard that even just attending meetings is doing a service in our Fellowship—meetings are one of our Twelve Tools. This time I could really feel that it was. When I arrived back at my hotel, I felt that the experience brought me closer to them and vice versa. It certainly gave me a renewed respect for their willingness to practice our principles. I felt even more grateful to be a member of the world-wide D.A. Fellowship.

Photo by Mike B., Richmond, Virginia—“Flight,” 2009

This photograph was taken at the site of my wedding to the partner of my dreams. We were there to check out the Japanese Garden. As this heron takes flight in the photograph I am reminded of the wedding day when our family and friends gathered in a small group in this setting to celebrate our union. We had saved and paid for the



wedding ourselves without incurring any unsecured debt.

More poignant was that on our actual wedding day, everyone pitched in with selfless service to make it happen. Driving the bride to the wedding, my sisters helping with the dress, friends holding up a silk canopy to surround us with their love, and, of course, my 9 year old son who took me for a walk beforehand, straightened my bowtie, and let me know I was the luckiest guy in town. He was my best man that day. Still is. I have learned in D.A. that we are not our bank accounts, status, and the rest—the real bedrock is love and service to others and ourselves.

And that flight never ends.

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