

Chair's Report to Assembly 2021

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Context

In 2020 at our first virtual region 9 assembly I stood for election to Chair for 1 year as David S stood down. I felt that as all the positions on the Region 9 Board were to be refreshed and (thus there would be a completely new board) as the outgoing treasurer it was the right thing to do to put myself forward to be chair to provide some continuity. I was really happy to be elected by the assembly and I have to say that I have really enjoyed my year as Chair.

Even though I was continuing into my fourth year on the board I was still very new and inexperienced in this role of chair. So everyone on the board was brand new and learning on the job. I did find that the outgoing chair, former chairs and the Region Chairs committee were brilliant in their support of me and I have learned so much in a year.

A year that has seen us stretch into another period of pandemic related lockdowns and travel disruption; a globally chaotic and disruptive picture. Region 9 covers 4 continents and while virtual solutions are holding many of us in our recovery I am always conscious of the compulsive eater out there in Region 9 without access to a computer, literature or meetings.

The first priority of the new Board was to learn the ropes of our jobs and to build a cohesive team that communicated well and could rely on each other for compassion and support.

Region Chair's Committee and Projects

I attend weekly meetings of the Region chairs and trustees that are offered as informal support and I find them extremely useful both in terms of getting direct personal support but also helping me to locate Region 9 in the way the fellowship operates at the World Service level.

The Region Chairs Committee, before Covid, used to meet quarterly but now meets online monthly. This impacts our budget because there has been an underspend for my travel which would have seen me fly to the USA to attend the Region Chairs meetings.

As part of the Region Chairs Committee I am bound to undertake a special project and I am paired with another region chair to work on "Podcasts in Languages Other than English". We have made a start on this but after Assembly 2021 if I am re-elected as Chair this will be a key priority to pursue. Region 9 is the obvious region to produce "podcasts in languages other than English".

World Service Business Conference

Please see also Prune's report as our WSBC Delegate.

I attended WSBC for the first time in 2021 and of course it was a virtual event. I found it shocking in many ways to experience the American-centred privilege in the space and how hard any of our Region 9 contributors had to work to raise the profile and concerns of the needs of our region. I found it quite hardgoing and had to take rigorous inventory to find the willingness to stay and participate.

What was incredible was the camaraderie and connection of the Region 9 attendees at WSBC who participated in a whatsapp group where we worked out in real time the implications of all the motions on Region 9 and gave each other encouragement and support to speak up in discussions. By the end of the week of WSBC I was back in love with the fellowship and even more deeply with our Region.

One of the most significant decisions at WSBC for me was that Special Focus groups were given the go ahead to form "Special Focus service boards" which would operate like "Language Service Boards" and one of the special focus service boards would be the (American terminology) BIPOC Special Focus (Black Indigenous and People of Colour).

A dialogue emerged during WSBC between myself and Black fellow based in the USA who is African American and she was passionate about the development of OA in Africa, which of course, is in Region 9. I can see how the development of a special focus group for Black people and people of colour globally will be a cornerstone in the expansion of OA in Africa. I find this celebration of diversity and difference to be hugely refreshing and vital to delivering our primary purpose.

Membership Survey

In early 2021 we sent out a survey to our membership via the Weekly Announcements. It was a short and simple open questionnaire which asked fellows to identify the opportunities and challenges they faced in carrying the message of OA to the compulsive eater.

We received 30 responses.

Among the fellows who responded who served at the group or intergroup level they indicated that they felt on average only 4/10 informed about the work of Region 9. Whereas fellows who had served at the regional level, inevitably felt better informed.

Most of our respondents felt that the shift towards more use of technology due to the pandemic was a real benefit to our ability to help the compulsive eater and many called for more podcasts, videos, information and online meetings to continue.

Conversely, the lack of face to face meetings in at this time due to pandemic restrictions was also listed as a real challenge; as was lack of technological knowledge or access to

technology. As always the issue of not having literature and meetings in their Mother Tongue was highlighted as a priority to address.

One of the key concerns people reported about “carrying the message” was uncertainty about how to maintain anonymity and how to do public information campaigns that are “attraction not promotion”.

This is a topic that has been discussed at the Region Chairs committee level which is that a co-ordinated press campaign by the Region would support smaller intergroups. Of course, most other regions only have one language to do their campaign in! But I feel that moving forwards this is something for us to consider at Region 9, as a response to our membership.

Motions Arising for 2021 Rationale

When I stood for election as Chair I said there was one major inevitable piece of work that we need to navigate and that is that Region 9 has no legal status and yet has a business bank account in the UK. This came to light during my time as treasurer because PayPal froze our account and asked us to prove who we were (ie not committing fraud) and (even though we are not committing fraud) we could not prove who we were. I would like to highlight and celebrate the work of our Treasurer Ricki and Banker Mel this year for progressing this issue.

We sent out an electronic poll to the membership of the 2020 Assembly to confirm that we the Board had the mandate to proceed to appoint a consultant to give us legal and tax advice about the best form of organisation for us. We will likely end up being registered as a charity or company in the UK for banking purposes.

It was giving me sleepless nights imagining the amount of work involved in establishing a legal entity and also the difficulties we would encounter as an international fellowship trying to find volunteers willing to take the responsibility of being on the board of a charity or company and undertake the legal duties involved. I also saw there would be a significant risk to continuity of business in the event of a fellow relapsing, quitting or disappearing (as we have to prepare for when working with addicts in recovery) but also simply that there is a rotation of board members on a regular basis anyway.

In prayer it occurred to me that since we have a large underspend from the previous financial year and the tradition 7 contributions have been consistently increasing that we could reasonably afford to employ someone (or more than one person) to administer and co-ordinate the legal entity. We could create a (virtual) Region 9 Office like we have the World Service Office to administer the business of the fellowship; we could have a paid administrator to establish consistency in Region 9.

To be honest since this idea landed in me I have felt so much more positive about the future of Region 9!

In addition to this we would like to pay for a webmaster and an accountant – so that these duties are undertaken by paid professionals which will alleviate the pressure on volunteers to do such important and weighty things.

Priorities for 2021-2022

Moving forwards (and I can only hope to be re-elected but if I am not and someone else is the Chair then I will be handing these priorities over):

1. Establish legal status
2. (If it be the will of the assembly) establish a paid co-ordinator position
3. Website redesign and relaunch
4. Podcasts in Languages other than English
5. Committee work in all their forms
6. (If it be the will of the assembly) deliver a hybrid assembly 2022
7. Strengthen Intergroups and NSBs both existing and new
8. Public Information campaign?
9. Continuing to strengthen teamwork of Board, Trustee and Committee Chairs

Conclusion

I would just like to thank our Trustee Vasiliki, the Board of the Region Ilanit, Gudrun Kristin and Ricki, our committee chairs Emilia, Esti and Loudovika, our webmaster Jutta (and for his service in the position Panagiotis), our new meetings welcomer Irene and our WSBC delegate Prune; and everyone who does service for Region 9 including members of committees, service volunteers and everyone making our second virtual assembly possible.

I would like to thank Ewa for volunteering to be our first Vice Chair who was unable to complete her years service.

I would just like to finish by saying that I haven't once regretted taking this position, I love it. I have learned so much and have so much to learn still but I love Region 9 more than I ever did before and I didn't think that was possible! We are such a vibrant, dynamic, evolving and diverse community of the worldwide fellowship – speaking so many different languages, practising many many different faiths, from different cultures and political climates, from the very wealthy to the very poor financially and materially, so many different backgrounds, stories and histories – all united by our shared dis-ease of compulsive eating and the common solution.

Whatever your Higher Power I thank HP for this opportunity to give service and to strengthen my own recovery; it is such an incredible blessing!