

May I take this opportunity (albeit somewhat belated) to wish all my fellow OAers a very happy New Year! I know it's not everybody's cup of tea, but I'm usually a big fan of New Year – usually quite keen to kiss goodbye to the old year and fully embrace the year to come. It's so much more pleasurable knowing that, thanks to our wonderful Programme of recovery, 1st January no longer has to symbolise the start of yet another restrictive diet for me. However, this New Year's Eve I intuitively had a sense of real foreboding and sure enough, less than three weeks later on 19th January, my newly found 'sixth sense' didn't prove me wrong as my dear old Mum severed her mortal coil.

For various different reasons, here I sit nearly four weeks later on the day of her funeral, doing what I know is a tried and tested way for me to hold onto my recovery and get me through tough times: service. The past few weeks since my Mum passed away have been a kind of 'purgatory' for me and God knows where I'd have been without this Fellowship, everybody in it, my Higher Power, the Programme of recovery and, of course, the meetings.

OA members at my home group have listened patiently and allowed me to share my emotional pain so that there has been absolutely no need for me to resort to my drug of choice: food. For this I will remain forever grateful. I hope to get to a meeting tomorrow when I'll probably need putting back together again*. However, just for today I feel strong and able to face life on life's terms and do what I could never have done were I still in the thick of my illness, i.e. be a responsible daughter, sister, niece, wife, mother, friend and fellow OA member.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you all and do service – just like each and every one of you does each time you show up at an OA meeting and thereby carry the message of recovery to the still suffering compulsive eater. Keep coming back – it works if you work it – through good times and bad.

Love in Fellowship

*Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

** Many thanks to those who made the Chichester meeting possible when I really needed it.*

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We need YOU to submit your shares, stories, letters, artwork, illustrations and poetry.

Share with fellow OAers around Great Britain.

Do some fun service and keep our Fellowship thriving.

Email all submissions to
stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

OR, write to
**SBS c/o OAGB, 483 Green Lanes
London N13 4BS**

**Submissions deadline for SBS Spring 2013 edition
is Friday, 10th May 2013. Topics:**

'Recovery from Relapse'

Step Twelve

Tradition Nine

Tool of Recovery: Anonymity

**or any topic of your choice; review a favourite piece of OA
approved literature; or share your experience of an OA
Event/Retreat/Workshop**

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Step Eleven

*"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God **as we understood Him**, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."*

I finally admitted that I needed OA fully in May of 2011. I attended my meeting each week, eventually found a sponsor and really started working towards recovery.

Now I am working my Programme every day to the best of my ability. I have walked through the Steps at least once or many times, using the Tools, including attending at least one meeting a week and working with my sponsor.

My Higher Power has graced me with twelve months' back-to-back abstinence and my physical recovery is good: five stones (32kg) in eleven months. I pray and meditate each morning and last thing at night. My conscious contact was good when I took time out to be still and write, so what was going wrong? After my prayers on awakening, I set off into my days but never managed to make conscious contact throughout the day. I only ever realised this as I made conscious contact at the end of each day with my prayers and reading. Remembering to remember to make conscious contact was especially difficult at work, despite a Serenity Prayer card and another little prompt card on my monitor.

However, I am prepared to go to any lengths. I asked for help in my daily prayers and my HP answered, as always.

I remembered something I had come across at a one-day workshop: to create a little folder containing cards, slogans and other OA readings. I found something to hold everything and then went through my OA notes and prayers, collected at various retreats and workshops, sorting through what would inspire me. I had also shared my dilemma with my sponsor and she told me she had bought a special necklace that she wore all the time and whenever she felt the need to make contact, she held it.

So I found a chain long enough to fit under my clothes (I still wanted to wear the jewellery that matched my outfit of the day, not that I am compulsive or obsessive about anything other than food, you understand!). What to put on the chain was not yet resolved but then my partner brought back a lovely saint's charm from a visit to the two cathedrals in our closest city.

Finally, I rooted out a small notebook and pinned a reminder of the Step Ten questions inside to remind me what I needed to review. I was ready.

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It's still not perfect but each lunchtime, I get out my mini readings and notebook and find that I make conscious contact, even if only for a little while, and eat more mindfully. My necklace moves enough to remind me to take my HP with me and ask for help in all my dealings with colleagues at work, especially those I find disturb my serenity.

It works if you work it, whatever aspect of the Programme you need to strengthen.

Caroline, Liverpool

Step Eleven

*"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God **as we understood Him**, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."*

You do have five minutes to spare for your recovery, dontcha?

'Amateur' Meditation Techniques

1. Breath Counting

Count your breaths 1 to 4, breathing naturally, and then start at 1 again. When your mind wanders, as it will, don't be judgemental about that. Just say to yourself, "I do not want to be thinking about that just now," and start counting again from 1. The work of meditation is not keeping your mind on something (e.g. counting your breaths) but bringing your mind back to it as it wanders off, as it always will.

2. Walking Meditation

Walk slowly and pay attention only to the walking, the feel of it, in great detail: the feel of the ground on your feet, the feeling within your feet, and also the rest of your body. Keep your mind on those few topics and, again, when it wanders off, bring it back to the feeling of your feet on the ground.

3. Inspiring Quote

Read the quote or passage over to yourself out loud. Each time you read it, emphasize a different word in the sentence and spend the meditation period (say 10-20 minutes) pondering the significance of the passage. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back to the beginning of the task and start again.

4. Location of Breathing

Sit quietly and take a few breaths. Notice where you seem to be breathing 'most', e.g. at the nostrils, shoulders, bottom of the ribs, back, front, sides, etc. Put your attention there and leave your attention there while you carry on breathing naturally. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back to that part of your body.

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5. 'Mind Observing Mind'

You allow your mind to wander, but your mind observing your mind says things like, "She's thinking about the next thing she's going to do. She's thinking about the last time she did meditation. She's thinking about time passing. She's thinking about what she's going to do next. She's thinking about her brother." When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back to the beginning of the task and start again.

6. Energy Hygiene

Spend a few minutes exchanging the kind of energy and thinking its opposite. For example, if you are feeling fearful, think of breathing out fear as you breathe out, and breathing in courage as you breathe in. If you are feeling despair, think of breathing out despair and breathing in hope. If you are feeling anger towards someone or something, think of breathing out anger and, as you breathe in, breathing in acceptance of that person. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back to the beginning of the task and start again.

7. Trap Door

Imagine opening a trap door in the bottom of your feet, and allowing all the bad stuff and negativity etc. to flow out through the feet into the ground and away. When that finishes, which can be quite soon or may take a few minutes, seal up that door with imaginary white light. Then open a trap door at the crown of your head (towards the back of the top of your head), and allow golden light or love, or something of that sort, to pour in and fill you up completely. When it has filled you up completely, seal up the trap door. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back to the beginning of the task and start again.

8. White Light

Imagine white light coming from your heart and pouring out from your heart to fill up the whole of your body: all the nooks and crannies and all the extremities, fingers and toes. When you are completely full of white light, imagine the white light coming out through your pores all around you to the rest of the room and shining out into the people nearest to you, and so on and so on as far as you want to take it. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back to the beginning of the task and start again.

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These are some of the ideas I have gleaned from workshops, books and friends over the years. If you are concerned about losing track of time, consider setting a mobile phone to vibrate or an alarm clock to ring (in another room so that it doesn't disturb you unduly when it goes off). I use a kitchen timer in a distant room so that I hear it but it doesn't repeat. They say that the only wrong way to do meditation is not to do it at all. I have found that even five minutes is better than nothing. The length of time tends to build up as the weeks go on because the benefits become gradually more evident as I build up the experience, and I have started actually wanting it!

You do have five minutes to spend on your recovery, dontcha?

Miriam

Tradition Seven

"Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." **(there's no magic wand!)**

After attending the World Service Business Conference and Region 9 Assembly and Convention, I realised that Tradition Seven is something people need to be aware of. Like the well-known saying, when you meet people, don't talk about politics, religion or money. However, just like being nice to other people and making a good impression on social occasions, the question of OA being self-supporting needs to be considered at every OA meeting by every OA member and it's no surprise that one of them is me.

It's easy to forget during daily life that as an individual I need to look at any income coming in (wages etc.) and my expenses (whatever they may be) for my needs and I pray a lot for my 'wants'. In the same way, OA also looks regularly at income and expenditure at the group, Intergroup, National, Regional and World Service level. It is no different and money doesn't appear by waving a magic wand, nor does it grow on trees, no matter how hard we wish for it.

After our last Intergroup meeting, I suggested covering the topic of Tradition Seven and reading the Tradition Seven leaflet for our next workshop. A big thank you to World Service Office (WSO) for printing that leaflet and to all the people involved. In addition to this leaflet, we are able to download Seventh Tradition skits [sketches] from the WSO website. We are going to perform one of these skits at our next Intergroup workshop.

I am sure lots of people will say, "Oh no, not money," and I know that for some people, the thought of discussing money sends them into a panic – I used to be the same. But I think it's important to run this workshop, just to remind people that the more money we contribute, the more OA can do and the more people will hear about OA and can be saved. I was one of them.

Money is not something inherently good or bad - it's just an item of exchange. At my first meeting, I contributed to the Tradition Seven pot because I really wanted recovery. Today, I contribute because I know it will help to carry the message of OA.

Thank you to OA and all of you. 'Together we can do what we could never do alone.' (from the *OA Promise 'I put my hand in yours'*)

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Tradition Eight

"Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers."

The important point that this Tradition makes is that OA should remain forever nonprofessional. In the long forms of this Tradition, it clarifies professional. The long form can be found at the end of *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous* (p.191). My understanding of the point they are making is that we do not employ professional counsellors or psychiatrists. The message can only be carried by a recovering compulsive eater, continually practising and growing in understanding of the Programme. Then, in dialogue with a fellow compulsive eater, talking of our understanding and practice of the Programme and learning from one another by this means. 'Those of us who live this program don't simply carry the message; we are the message.' (*The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*, p.106.)

There are two reasons why it is so important that we are not paid for carrying the message: Firstly, the person to whom we are carrying the OA message is far more likely to be able to hear what we are offering if they know we have no other agenda than to be helpful and certainly receive no payment for doing it. Secondly, it is important for us that our focus is on giving of ourselves to another. As I see it, though we do get rewards in the pleasure of giving of ourselves and in our own recovery, these are not our focus as we hold out our hands to another compulsive eater. Of course there are many other services in OA and these services are listed in the OA Handbook. To function well, OA needs these services to be done, and part of my responsibility is to give back to OA some of what OA has given me. The Seventh Tradition is not just about money; it is also about service.

A few of these services involve costs. As a designated downloader, there is the cost of printing out the items you bring to your group. As a delegate to the National Assembly, there is the registration fee, the cost of the hotel and the cost of travel. Often members do not charge their group for printing a few pages but regard the cost more as part of their financial contribution to OA. However, the much higher cost of sending a delegate to the National Assembly should be paid by OA; if it was left to each delegate to pay their own expenses, only wealthy members would be able to give this service. But note, though the sums involved in sending a delegate to the National Assembly will be high, it is only for their expenses – there is no payment to the delegate for their service given.

For OA to function well, a lot of service is needed beyond group level. A lot of this service is the free giving of time and expertise to OA with only the expenses of this service covered. But there are services needed by OA that require more time than any member can give freely and some of these services may also require specific skills. Some Intergroups in the USA have an office with a paid employee. In this country, our Literature Administrator is paid for a few hours a week. WSO has paid employees who are experts in their fields. All these employees are invaluable; they carry out the tasks that we members ask them to do, tasks that require time and expertise way beyond anything we would be able to give.

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One task that an employee would never do is that one-to-one holding out a hand to a suffering compulsive eater. If asked for help, they would direct the enquirer to a member that could help them. Of course the employee can still give the enquirer information about meetings, literature and OA events etc.

Another important point about the tasks undertaken by employees is that we ask them to carry out certain tasks, but we leave up to them the details of how to fulfil them. The employees will have expertise and experience we do not have and the time to work out how best to undertake the tasks.

My experience working with OA employees is two-fold. Currently, all of us on OAGB's Literature Committee work with Deborah, the Literature Administrator. I know I could not give the service I give without her support and expertise. Before serving on the Literature Committee, the service I gave involved working with staff at WSO. I served for a limited time; the employees I had been working with had expertise I did not have and had worked in that area much longer than me. These facts enabled them to give me very important back-up, for example on legal questions about copyright.

I want to finish by saying that when I had the opportunity to work with the staff at WSO, I came to value the marvellous way they serve us all. They deserve gratitude and respect from us all.

Kathleen

Tradition Eight

There is a saying in Twelve-Step groups that in order to keep it [recovery], you must give it away. The Twelfth Step says, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

The Eighth Tradition ensures that any time a newcomer reaches out for help in OA, he/she will receive it free of charge. Members freely share their own experience, strength and hope with the newcomer to help themselves in their own recovery in the process of 'giving it away in order to keep it.' Today in modern society, carrying the message is not only accomplished face-to-face or by telephone but also online. Today, technology helps to carry the message to the compulsive eater that still suffers.

The Eighth Tradition is simple, as it is only referring to Twelfth-Step work, e.g. not to be paid for our services of holding or speaking at workshops; visiting a potential newcomer with another member to introduce the OA Programme; going to meetings; and public information (PI) work etc. For an individual to make a profit is not in OA's best interests. However, paying a person (whether a member of OA or not) to do a 'job' for us that is NOT Twelfth-Step work, e.g. staffing an OA office or checking our legal position or our accounts, is absolutely within the spirit of Tradition Eight. Paying someone for their services outside of Twelfth-Step work does not compromise OA's message: it just gets other jobs done so that the recovering compulsive eater has the freedom to be there and respond and help another sufferer.

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"Meeting makers make it"

It is all right for an OA member who is also a therapist to encourage attendance at OA, or to discuss progress within the framework of the Steps with the suffering client within therapeutic sessions. The full context of this Tradition is saying that OA itself, as an organisation, does not hire any paid counsellors to go out and do OUR usual Twelfth-Step work and that in OA we are friendly with our friends in the treatment community, even those who don't completely agree with our methods. We do not hold a monopoly on recovery from compulsive eating.

Those who work in service for us are worthy of their hire. This very important Tradition is the very rock on which the freely given Programme of OA is built. Someone has to answer the phone while the rest of us get on with our regained lives.

OA is not a therapy where a professional is paid to help. We help because we want to and because we have to. If we don't help others, we risk our own abstinence and serenity. Helping others helps us.

Anonymous

'Planting the seed...reaching out to newcomers, returning members and each other'

I am grateful for the seed planted in me. It came in the form of a small magazine article where a celebrity had been 'papped' going into an OA meeting. That was many years ago and that tiny seed lay buried, not getting any light or water to grow, until I was in the deepest, darkest grips of pain from compulsive overeating. I had run out of answers and was desperate enough to be willing to go to any lengths. Until then, I was not ready to hear the solution, let alone to learn and start living it.

It is helpful to remember that, when I have opportunities to 'plant the seed' of OA it is not up to me to convince someone OA is for them, whether that be a newcomer, work colleague or potential sponsee. In fact, it is likely to put them off OA! I do not know what they need. I can simply say what's worked for me and be confident that I am carrying the message by maintaining a healthy body weight and trying to be a decent person.

No matter how uncomfortable it makes me feel to witness someone else in denial and pain, I can pray for them that they find what they need when they're ready. I know for me, I wasn't ready for the honesty, openness and willingness to pick up the Tools and start working the Steps until I had reached the end of the road with the realisation that I could not control my eating. My ego had to be smashed! Only then was I ready for the psychic change about to take place. Today, I am grateful for the miracle. Food is no longer my Higher Power and I have a new way to live, one day at a time.

Anonymous, London

Willingness is the key

God bless you all. I wish you a blessed, abstinent, inspiring, enriching, selfless day, filled with laughter, love and light. This was out of my reach when I was eating compulsively and the same can also be true of my life today, when I take control and try to do God's job. That is so draining spiritually and robs me of my very spirit.

My spirit and my true self are what are emerging as I continue on my journey of recovery and discovery and – sometimes - I like myself.

Wow, what a God-given miracle!

Little did I realise, when I went to OA all those years ago, that I was spiritually sick. I know wholeheartedly, that I must share my experience, strength and hope, my story, at any given opportunity to remain well; to be able to say that recovery is possible to anyone who wants it. I am the same as everyone else in OA.

Willingness is the key: to want to recover above all else; to put my Programme first in my life. Of course, I fall short many times but the Steps allow me to see my mistakes and amend them.

God bless you all.

Helen, Stockport

Tool of Recovery: Meetings

I was systematically tortured from a very early age until the age of 24. As I grew, I saw the world as a bleak, frightening place full of hurt and cruel people. I somehow held onto a faith in God because it was all I had to comfort me for many years, God and food, and when my trust in God was damaged, it became more and more food and less and less God.

I came to OA about twelve years ago at 26 stones (165kg) and during the first meeting I knew I had come home, that there was somewhere in the world that I was safe, and I began to feel some hope. As I attended the meeting, my trust in God, which had been sadly even more damaged by my experiences of church, began to heal, and it gradually became that I was having a little bit more God and a bit less food. More and more Higher Power and less and less food. I am a much healthier weight these days. I have learnt to comfort myself with music, friends, by gently stroking my own hand and with a small teddy bear. I was not allowed to and punished for comforting myself as a child. I was only encouraged to overeat.

I believe I have found the safest place in the world for me where groups of people come together to trust in a Higher Power to help them abstain.

Thank you, George/Joy

Tool: Meetings

I really love my weekly meeting, even though I do find (even after all these years) that the little voice at the back of my mind tells me that I don't need to go and could stay at home. However, it is at these times that I need meetings even more.

At last, I thought, there are other people like me. I needed to hear their experience, strength and hope for myself: something I still need today. At first the meetings were like a Higher Power to me, until I could find a God of my understanding.

Early on in recovery, I attended lots of meetings in my area, as I am very lucky to have a choice. I needed as many as I could fit in. I've even been lucky enough to help try and set up some meetings. They closed eventually, but it helped me more that I helped the meeting.

It also gave me a safe place to share my innermost, darkest thoughts and feelings, where people understood me, and I learned to feel accepted and a valued member of the Fellowship. There is something amazingly powerful about being in a room with like-minded people, where I don't need to hide who I am, or keep up that mask I always wore. I know I can share in a meeting and no one will judge me.

I still attend the small meeting every Monday night, with the same familiar faces and some new additions. As much as I go for my weekly face-to-face contact with my OA friends, I also do service and help newcomers as much as I can. It's my role to help others and extend that hand to those in need, just as others helped me.

I would literally be lost without meetings. Thanks to all those who have created the meetings we have today and all those who give service to this life-saving Fellowship.

Anonymous

Keep coming back - for together, we get better

Sitting at a meeting, breathing shallow, tight throat, fear, anger and feeling uncomfortable. "Look at them all," my illness speaks, "You'll never get what they have." Trying to gain concentration, I look at the sharer telling us her story of what it was like for her: the bingeing; how it got worse; how she needed help; how she found she had an illness called 'compulsive overeating' and her ongoing journey of recovery; the hope, the peace; the Step-work and how she arrests the illness on a daily basis with God's help. She was sitting there free and I was sitting there bound. I wanted what she had – yes, I wanted it badly, I felt desperate. After the meeting, people came up to me, asked me how I was, gave me a hug and said, "Keep coming back."

"Do six meetings," it was suggested. "OK," I thought, "I'll do that." My illness didn't like it - repeated judgements - the disease wanted me in isolation. I knew I couldn't keep being alone.

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I joined a home group and started to do service. The meeting and its Fellowship held me each week and in between. In the early days I felt tremendously vulnerable and uncomfortable but something kept me going back: the power of the group was becoming my salvation. I could talk about relapse and the disappointment. I learned not to beat myself up and I learned to keep going back, no matter what. People helped me to feel I was doing well when I got a few days free of compulsive overeating and told me what they did to keep continuing. I took down phone numbers and rang in times of need when it was that or the food. Sometimes it was both but I always found a useful suggestion from another OA member to keep going and feel supported.

A few months into recovery, I went to my first convention and loved the power in the rooms on a larger scale. I even found myself at the microphone, sharing my experience, strength and hope!! I couldn't believe I was up there. It was as if a wind of grace swept me on to the stage. I felt a great strength up there and I could see people from my home group in the chairs. It was as if I was looking back on my life and had reached a moment to remember; I was starting to get free of this illness. I had found hope and strength and what I wanted to do was to help others to do the same.

It is one year on now and I have considerable abstinence and feel blessed. Today at my home group, I talked about my feelings and how building on my growth and the growth of others is far better than anything a supermarket has to offer me. For today, I am growing in sanity and learning what the disease of compulsive overeating is all about. Once my friend, it became my enemy and now it's something I live with, arresting it on a daily basis. I look forward to my meetings and seeing other OA members. No more do I have all the uncomfortable feelings I had at the beginning and I can now help other newcomers. I know what they feel like - I was there!

"Keep coming back," I say - for together, we get better.

Emma, Bristol

I did not understand how powerful the meetings actually are

At the beginning of recovery, I heard people say that it was important for recovery to get to meetings.

At first I felt irritated by this comment and put myself and my life first. I felt they just said that to get me to go to the meetings to make the numbers up. Therefore, thinking I knew what was best for me, I went when it suited me and I struggled to get the recovery I desired.

I did not understand how powerful the meetings actually are. Going to meetings and putting yourself first can feel like a selfish thing to do but now I understand that by not getting to meetings, I am depriving all the people in my life of the best 'me'. I did not get this understanding until it was time to pass the responsibility of the key to our meeting room on to another Fellow. I had a feeling it was going to be me. I was quite cross about this as I had four children and lived half an hour away; I was too busy. I wasn't confident that I was going to be reliable and I had such a lot of fear around the responsibility. Up until then, I had never been reliable. I was often the sort of person who could not make things. I was often late sometimes, went off sick etc.

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"I surrender. Where is the meeting?"

Anyway, we were a very small group at the time and everyone else had done their fair share so I knew it had to be my turn. I took the key. I was so scared of losing it; I had constant fear it would go missing due to my children or myself. Looking back, I can see I had no trust in my Higher Power and no understanding that if I did my bit, maybe my Higher Power would look after the rest.

This responsibility of that service at my meeting has been a major part of the turning point in my recovery.

I found to my amazement that I became reliable; I got to the meetings every week and I never did lose the key. I opened up on time, even getting there fifteen minutes early to make sure everything was ready. I found it made me feel really good about myself and that I can be relied on. I was in shock! Being able to hand the fear over to a Power greater than myself helped. I started to understand how my presence every week was very important. It was not just about me, it was about being there to help others too. I gained a lot of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect by doing this service.

Before OA, I always felt not good enough and let other people do things, as they must be better than me. I have always been so scared to mess up and that people might see who I thought was the real me - someone who isn't that good, not good enough, not capable. In OA, I can practise in a safe environment overcoming fear that has no place being there and letting the real me come out. I am so grateful to OA and my Fellows for helping me.

Since holding the key last autumn and going to plenty of meetings, it has made me hungry for recovery. I found myself wanting recovery more and more with each meeting. I began to work the Programme harder. I have now worked all the Steps and our group's Higher Power has sent more newcomers into our meetings. This has given me the opportunity to sponsor, which I was nervous of at first, but after the key incident I now remember to rely on my HP for direction. I find myself saying things that must come from a Higher Power because I have caught myself saying things I did not know I knew before. Sponsorship is strengthening my recovery day by day.

I am so grateful to OA. My old ideas are changing and I am hearing and learning new ideas all the time.

Sharon, Shrewsbury

I am grateful for meetings

I am grateful that meetings are one of the nine Tools of OA, otherwise my disease would prevent me from going as often, if at all. You see, my disease of compulsive overeating is one of isolation and my defects of fear, dishonesty and selfishness can feed into that want to isolate and convince me not to go.

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Fear – this is my fear of people; fear of being open and honest and not sounding smart enough when sharing; fear that my recovery is not as strong as it should be and that I'll get found out; fear of not being slim or attractive enough, as I want to be the perfect example to a newcomer.

Dishonest – whenever I think I am doing OK and don't need a meeting, I am being dishonest because all I ever have is a daily reprieve from this disease; whenever I think I don't have anything to offer the meeting, I am being dishonest because as long as I am abstinent, I have a duty to carry the message of recovery.

Selfish – keeping recovery to myself; feeling 'less than' is me slipping into self-pity, which is also a form of self-centredness; thinking I have it sussed and don't need a meeting.

Sometimes these thoughts still appear but as long as I continue to stay abstinent and work the Steps, I can clearly distinguish between the truth and the lies! I also know that I don't have to act on these feelings. I can be aware of them, accept them, watch them, write about them, talk about them, but I do not have to act on them and especially not eat over them!

Working the Steps and having a Higher Power in my life gives me choices. I am no longer the victim of my own self-will. I am grateful for meetings - to connect with other compulsive overeaters and to learn and share my experience, strength and hope about this disease and the solution this wonderful Programme has to offer.

Anonymous, London

Gatherings of Fellowship, aka meetings

The opportunity to share my experience, strength and hope around meetings gives me a warm glow. For me, attending a weekly meeting is non-negotiable, as it is in the rooms that I see and listen to 'God with skin on'. Never in a million years did I think that I would feel so at home in odd venues.

There are many different types of meetings and - for me - the repetition of the format calms my need to cut corners or improvise. It teaches me discipline and to put my will away. Group conscience means I am an equal member with a voice.

To have the love, acceptance and understanding from those who share my compulsion is awesome. Fellowship people really 'get' me. Hugs received are healing and the wise words spoken priceless.

Meetings for me keep me in reality, connected and 100% aware that I am a compulsive overeater and threefold recovery is available if I follow some basic suggestions.

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"Formula for failure: trying to please everyone"

The meetings link all the Tools. We sell literature and read it; many forms of service are carried out; sponsors attend; following group conscience, actions are taken to ensure change; a notepad is sent round for numbers to be given and taken for members to call people; we text and e-mail members to share information, thus using the Tool of writing. Our code of confidentiality promotes anonymity and assisted with my trusting. In order to maintain long-term abstinence, the use of a personal eating plan is suggested and many members get tips from others who have what they want. To follow OA's definition of abstinence to the letter helps me to know I am in the right Fellowship. My desire not to overeat is stronger now than at the beginning of my journey.

There are times when I am not too keen to go but I clear my mind and let go of any expectations, remembering the concept of 'what can I take to?' rather than 'expect from'. Where I live, we are very fortunate to have a number of meetings within a 30-minute drive and I am very grateful for that. I really need to see and hear identification.

When I was finally willing to engage with a sponsor in order to see the recovery I wanted, I needed to branch out and attend more meetings. For my progressive, threefold recovery, I try to attend different meetings. We make lifelong friends but we have to work to do so.

I am guilty of feeling over-responsible for sharing the message and so recently have been working on 'Easy does it' and just being an 'attraction'!! I aim for an honest share and illustrate how I use the Steps to help any situation.

There is vast diversity of the disease but WE have a common solution. Meetings are where I go to nourish my soul. To feel the love of my Fellows is a blessing and saying the Serenity Prayer in unison very humbling. I have learnt many skills by offering to do jobs and my patience, tolerance, love and compassion are increasing as I sit open-minded and listen to shares. Judging is a thing of the past, as it is by the grace of my God I am where I am today.

I have become a responsible human being who happily commits to things and completes the task. Seventh Tradition to me is not just money: I give my money and time, enabling me to stand on my own two feet and be self-sufficient. I have learnt to share information and rotate positions, which is healthy and suggested. We are all but trusted servants.

I consider that I have had a meeting whilst writing this, as my Higher Power has guided me. I am so grateful for OA and each and every meeting in the world. I feel the ripple to OAGB, Region 9 and WSO. WE are not alone.

Many thanks for reading. I look forward to seeing many of you this year at meetings/retreats/conventions/Assembly or just have a coffee with YOU.

God bless.

Love Suzi, North West

Each meeting I attend is payment on my abstinence

I returned to OA in May of 2011 after not being able to admit that I was a compulsive overeater the first time round (about 20 years ago). I had reached my rock bottom and was ready this time both to admit I was a compulsive overeater and that the pain of this was worse than the pain of remaining in my disease. I hung onto 'keep coming back' and I did. Week after week, once a week on a Thursday evening, I absorbed the love, fellowship and Programme, even though I didn't get abstinent for almost nine months. I cried, I laughed, I whinged, I shared and, most importantly, I listened. I took the key so I would have to turn up each week and I did, except the one week I was away.

Unfortunately, come the October of my first months in OA, I was sitting outside waiting to have a meeting and to welcome the other members. After six lonely and frustrating weeks alone, I rearranged my evenings to go to the Tuesday meeting and handed over the Thursday key and meeting. It never reopened but 'willing to go to any lengths' is my mantra.

Tuesday then became my home meeting. I found out about workshops and retreats and found a sponsor who had what I wanted and she began to take me through the Steps using AA's 'Big Book'. My first sponsor and my Tuesday meeting helped me to gain abstinence (one day at a time); physical recovery; spiritual growth; and moving towards emotional maturity. I give service, I work the Programme to the best of my ability daily, use the Tools, keep moving through and between the Steps, go to retreats and workshops and attend my meeting every week, no matter what. I get so much from my meeting, although it is small, and hope that I give back on a weekly basis a little of what I have received.

Unfortunately this meeting is now struggling, with two or three regular members. What happens to it is in Higher Power's hands but so is my recovery, as long as I do the footwork. So if I need to find a new meeting to continue to recover and stay abstinent, then I will. Each of the Tools contributes to our recovery but as I read on a little card from a recent workshop, each meeting I attend is payment on my abstinence (thank you Sandbach/Newcastle under Lyme groups). We all need to support our home meeting and remember that this is the first place newcomers experience our Programme.

Caroline, Liverpool

I finally realised that I wasn't in charge

My name is Yvonne and I'm a recovered compulsive overeater. I have been a grateful member of OA since March 2009 and have been abstinent since then, maintaining around a nine-stone (57kg) weight loss. I was fortunate to have the gift of desperation from the start, getting a sponsor who kindly gave me her time and knowledge to go through the Twelve Steps. I joined a group, no, three groups. I set out to save the world with all my new-found knowledge: yes, self-will run riot. After more than a few inventories I finally realised that I wasn't in charge. My recovery has been one massive learning curve but I've always had to hurt before I learn. I am an active member of the Cumbernauld Tuesday Step Group just outside Glasgow and have served in several roles in the group. I've helped with our Intergroup's public information (PI) as well as in other Glasgow groups, representing them at OAGB.

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From early on I was told how important the Tools were to my recovery, none more so than meetings. And in that time it's the remembering that piece of advice, as I've suffered other addiction problems and mental health issues, that's kept me abstinent. During that time, I have gone from not being able to get enough of my meetings, to hating everything and everyone in them. I realised that I was spiritually unwell and it was my disease talking. If it wasn't for my commitment to my home group and being responsible as the OA contact for that group, I could easily have slipped back into my old ways and habits.

Even though I didn't feel I was much use at my meeting, I could at least share that I knew deep down that food could not fix me. I know today that what will keep me abstinent and well is passing on my experience, strength and hope to the still suffering compulsive eater and sharing what I was so freely given by the wonderful folk I have met on my bumpy road to recovery. I can wholeheartedly say that by using all the Tools suggested I am now trudging 'the Road of Happy Destiny' (AA 'Big Book', p.164), as it really does work if you work it.

Yvonne, Glasgow

Meetings - an invaluable Tool for me

'For Today' February 7, p.38: 'I listen to all who speak at meetings because I can never know in advance when someone will say just what I need to hear.'

Meetings for me are the visible, tangible embodiment of OA, a true Fellowship of unconditional love, expressed through warm greetings, smiles, hugs, acknowledgement, humour, acceptance and honesty, and after the meetings are over, encouragement, suggestions and support.

I can say this with absolute sincerity after eighteen months in OA, though it wasn't always so.

The journey started with a phone call and invitation to a meeting, at which, although everyone was friendly and greeted me warmly, I felt completely ill at ease.

I was a veteran meeting attendee in my professional working life and in the voluntary organisations with which I was associated. There I would impart my knowledge, knew my place, status and role, and would scan the room to see who was more senior or more experienced. My contribution would be aimed at leaving the impression that my knowledge and experience was equal to theirs!

How different this first OA meeting was for me. I only knew first names, I didn't know people's occupations and I was unable to gauge where I fitted in the hierarchy, as there wasn't one. People were taking it in turns to share their most personal experiences about their lives before and during OA. I felt overwhelmed, both very privileged to be privy to this trust, and, at the same time, not wanting to hear these secrets, which shouldn't be shared so publicly. I saw only differences and not similarities.

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I did as suggested, kept coming back to see if I heard anything that chimed with my own experience. I felt an observer for quite a few meetings as I was simply not able to share anything, sometimes because I was scared and blocked inside, sometimes because I felt too emotional to open my mouth, as I didn't know how I would stop talking if I started.

Then I had a lightbulb moment. One cold Friday evening, sitting in a room of about twelve people, my life story was revealed - as a child, a teenager, an employee, a mother and a partner - and I hadn't even opened my mouth, yet I saw how my egotism, obsessions, behaviours and addictions had been, and still were, ruling my life and that of my family.

My day starts with readings from '*For Today*' and '*Voices of Recovery*'. I then say my prayers and try to meditate for ten minutes. This gives me the grounding for my day. I have handed my day over to my Higher Power and sometimes my readings or meditation give me insight into myself or prompt me to text a fellow member. Sometimes I am reminded of someone's 'share' at a recent meeting and though I had not registered it when heard, it comes back to me in a way that speaks to me of my own behaviour and I can learn how to change it. Next, the day's food is planned and texted to my sponsor, and on good days I don't try to take control back, but enjoy not being in charge, being the foot soldier.

I have never been able to learn well on my own; long distance learning or correspondence courses are not for me. I have never been able to succeed that way. I need to be around people. Meetings are core to my recovery; they give me opportunities to put into practice what I have learnt about myself through working the Steps, by sharing openly and honestly. I still don't know what I am going to say at meetings and am occasionally surprised, embarrassed or taken aback by what comes out. I have learnt that it is ok, and I am accepted for who I am, and not for the pearls of wisdom that I would have wanted to be known for in my past life. I need the meetings as much as I need the Steps and Traditions and I have learned so much more, in such a short time, than I could ever have imagined. I am so grateful that meetings are one of the Tools of OA.

Linda, Reading

We keep the meeting simple

I'm grateful for my home meeting, which focuses on recovery from compulsive overeating. Leaders are abstinent (the day's leader has minimum 30 days' abstinence) and are working the Steps. They are always willing to share which Step they are on, how long they have been abstinent, and how they use the Tools to stay abstinent. We keep the meeting simple, with a format that includes reading the Steps and Traditions each week. We share on the Tools, with a two-minute limit per Tool, each week. The use of a timer keeps the meeting safe for newcomers and old-timers alike; no one can hog the time, and many get the opportunity to share.

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"Our faith should be our steering wheel not our spare tyre"

We have a ten minute break in the middle when we talk with newcomers and visitors, and folks have a chance to chat over tea. Group conscience meetings are held directly after the meeting on the second week of each month.

On the first week of the month, we have a speaker (20 minutes) and lead a Step-study from the *Alcoholics Anonymous 'Big Book'*; on the second, third and fifth weeks we read from the *'Big Book'*, working from front to back; and on the fourth week we have a speaker with at least six months' abstinence sharing about their recovery, focussing especially on how they have worked the Steps, following the directions from the *AA 'Big Book'*. Last week I counted eighteen regulars, all with some current abstinence behind them! What a wonderful group to be with as we *'trudge the Road of Happy Destiny'* (*AA 'Big Book'*, p.164).

Anonymous, London

I find that people rush off after meetings

I really struggle with the Tool of meetings. As a still suffering compulsive overeater, I very much respect the shares from people with years of recovery behind them but they often feel too far away from the stage I'm currently at.

The preamble mentions that OA is home to those who feel weak (and I certainly do!) and the suggested meeting format mentions speaking to your sponsor or to someone after the meeting if you need further support or information. However, many newcomers to my group experienced the shortage in available sponsors and one left the Fellowship as she was unable to get one after many months of trying. I currently have no sponsor, despite asking many potential sponsors, and I find that people rush off after meetings, either because they are busy or to have coffee/lunch with their OA friends. This means I often feel really low/frustrated/confused about OA stuff when I leave meetings and have to use other Tools to try to feel better.

I want to feel hope and strength and I keep coming back as I feel that OA is the right place for me but sometimes I feel the average meeting doesn't really cater for those who still suffer. I wonder how other meetings have found a better way of catering for the whole spectrum of compulsive overeaters, from newcomers to those who have experienced a long recovery?

Anonymous

Review of OA-approved Literature

'Came to Believe', Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1973

Initially, I completed Step Three like a tick sheet. "Sure, I turn my life over to the care of God. Tick. Now on to Step Four." However, I soon realised - as I was giving the finger to the driver who cut me off - that maybe I hadn't fully comprehended the Step. Therefore, I started waking up earlier in the morning for 'prayer'. The AA *'Big Book'* and OA's *'For Today'* in hand, I started reciting the Step Three prayer and other prayers from Programme. "Look at me," I thought smugly, "I am so spiritually fit!" Cut to later that evening: I have thrown myself on the bed and I am crying tears of frustration and punching a pillow, wishing it was my husband's face. Hopefully, third time is a charm because clearly I am not a woman handing over her life or her will! Take three for Step Three.

I heard a Fellow mention the *'Came to Believe'* text in a meeting. I bought it, read it and, through its wisdom, I feel much more secure and assured that I have truly understood and practise Step Three daily.

The subtitle of the book describes its content as *'the spiritual adventure of AA as experienced by individual members'*. My individual spiritual adventure has consisted of me acknowledging that I never had a relationship with God/Higher Power. Sitting down to 'pray' was not working because I did not even know who the God of my understanding was! I re-read my Step-work and started to talk to the God of my understanding that I described.

As I built on our relationship, I read *'Came to Believe'*. It offered me insight into individuals' very varied 'spiritual awakenings' (Chapter Five), whilst my favourite chapter 'Coincidence?' tells some miraculous stories that could not have occurred without some divine intervention.

My spiritual adventure is continuing today. There is even mention in the rooms of the time it takes to come, to come to, to come to believe. Today, I trust God and know he is in charge, not me. What a gift!

Sharon K, London

Notes from OAGB Literature Service

The new order form

The current order form is valid until the end of February 2013. The new order form will be coming out soon. It will be valid from March 2013 to the end of February 2014.

Some things to look out for with the new order form:

- If you are ordering your literature by post, make sure you check the address to which you send your order: there will probably be a new address for literature orders;

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"God can't give you anything new until you let go of the old"

- Of course this will not affect those ordering online;
- There are a few minor changes to prices;
- We have had many people asking for copies of the Big Book Pocket Edition. This contains the first 164 pages (that is all the Programme) plus Dr Bob's Nightmare and the Appendices. You will find this on the new order form and it will be added to the online shop;
- During the last three years, there have been revisions to many pamphlets. When a pamphlet has been revised, we note that on the order form. When pamphlets are reprinted, they are reprinted with the new cover designs but in many cases the text has not been revised. The revision date we give refers only to revisions to the text;
- We have noticed that when someone orders OAGB's New Group Starter Kit, they often order the OA Handbook as well. Of course you can order as many OA Handbooks as you want, but we thought it may be useful to note that the OA Handbook is included in the Starter Kit.

Information oddments

All copies of *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous* that we are now selling have been updated to include reference to the nine Tools. They also include an index.

Occasionally there have been questions about the differences between New Prospect Cards and Notice Board Attraction Cards. (On the website these still have their American name of Bulletin Board Attraction Cards - we will be amending that to the UK English name.)

Both of these items give a simple description of what OA is and all the contact details for OAGB, plus a space to add any local contact information if you wish.

The difference is the Notice Board Card. It is postcard-sized, a size that many notice boards are ready to accept. The New Prospect Card is credit card-sized, printed on both sides, designed to be carried around and handed out to anyone who may be interested in OA, or left lying around in any place so it may just be picked up by someone needing OA.

Please buy your literature from OAGB's Literature Service

World Service Office have an agreement with an online bookseller to sell OA's e-books. They and other online booksellers also have available second-hand OA literature.

Of course second-hand books are likely to be cheaper than new books, even if they are in good condition, but there are two good reasons for buying your books from OA rather than via other online booksellers.

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First: Every year at the World Service Business Conference (which is the global group conscience meeting of OA), Intergroups and service bodies all over the world are invited to put forward suggestions (motions) about such important matters as ways of increasing the depth of understanding of our disease and how to get and maintain our daily freedom from its effects. There are also suggestions about policy changes that may enable us to work more effectively to maintain our own recovery, make OA better known and help others recover.

These suggestions (motions) are discussed at the World Service Business Conference, and those agreed by delegates may require changes to our literature. Two very important recent changes were agreed at Conference: a ninth Tool (Action Plan) was added to our Tools of Recovery, and our definition of abstinence was amended to include working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. As the literature containing references to Tools of Recovery, or explanation of what abstinence is, are reprinted, the literature is amended to include these updates.

As well as these important changes, there are often other useful changes made, for example the recent printing of *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous* has the addition of a very useful index. The literature is also becoming more inclusive: that is, using language that includes many different expressions of our common illness, not just overeaters, but also anorexics, bulimics and those suffering from various combinations of these forms of the illness.

When you buy second-hand literature, you will probably be getting some out-of-date information about our disease and how we get freedom from it.

Second: If you buy your literature from other online booksellers, all the profits from that sale go to them. If you buy your literature from OA any surplus from that sale goes to OA to enable OA to carry our message of recovery.

Kathleen, on behalf of OAGB's Literature Service

Interview with Jacqueline, Secretary - OAGB National Service Board

1. How and when did you find OA?

In 2006, I had just finished doing a commercial, very low calorie diet for the third time and had just lost more than four stones (25kg) for the third time. I don't know how I heard about OA but I went to a few meetings, as although I was thin (my only goal at that time), I kind of knew it wasn't mine to keep. I didn't stay around, though, and don't remember much about why. In June 2008, after another failed attempt at the very low calorie diet and some real desperation around my 30-year cycle of mainly bingeing and some starving, someone in my diet group said she was going to an OA meeting and asked would I like to come along. I went to the East Finchley meeting in north London and I still go every Sunday.

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2. How long have you been on the Board in your current role?

I have been Board Secretary since October 2012.

3. What does the role of Secretary entail?

It entails being very organised and keeping on top of my emails! As Secretary I prepare the paperwork before and after NSB meetings, including putting together the meeting packs and Board News. I also undertake administrative tasks like updating our licence to use the OA logo. This year, I have undertaken to co-ordinate the updating of the OAGB 'Blue Book'. This is the procedural manual that the Board has, containing everything from how to host a National Assembly to Bylaws and policy documents, contacts for our Region and Intergroups, job descriptions and many other documents besides. Some things can get out of date quickly so it needs attention. I will be working closely with the Chair on the National Assembly but I have no experience of that as Secretary yet, as I only started in this role after the 2012 National Assembly.

4. How long were you on the Board in your previous role?

Before becoming Secretary, I was Public Information Officer for one year.

5. Why do you think Public Information is so important in the Fellowship?

Unlike some other Twelve-Step fellowships, OA is not very widely known. In my time as PI Officer, I went to many hospitals to give talks, and around 90% of the people I spoke to, some of them experts in obesity treatment, had never heard of OA. Also as part of Step Twelve, I need to carry the message, both inside and outside the Fellowship.

6. What made you decide to stand for election to the Board originally?

It was a combination of things. I had done service at my Intergroup (South and East England) for a couple of years and felt I was able to give more to the Fellowship in terms of time and commitment. Also, being in recovery has really challenged my complacent idea of, "Oh well, someone else will do that," and not taking responsibility for myself. I am passionate in OA about the idea that there is no 'them', only 'us', and as soon as I was able to do service, I did. Also, I saw someone who had come into recovery at the same time as me on the Board and realised that I was able to be a part of that - that the Board is made up of members of OA, no more, no less and is not a separate 'over there' entity. And finally, I'm quite opinionated and I understood that if I had ideas, rather than muttering about not liking the way something was done, I could help to make changes!

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7. What would you say to anyone thinking of standing for the Board?

Come to an NSB board meeting as a visitor (all are welcome) and/or talk to a couple of Board members about their experiences. Check your motives and be realistic about how much time you have. Don't sacrifice your recovery because you think you ought to be ready. I knew when I was ready to give this service and the cliché is true - I have experienced a lot of growth as a result.

8. What other service have you given in the Fellowship?

I have given a lot of service at group level. After I had been in Fellowship for about eighteen months, I became an Intergroup Officer and served as Treasurer for two years. This year, I am also serving as the World Service Delegate for my Intergroup and will go to Albuquerque for the Business Conference in April.

9. What has been the highlight of all your service to date?

When I was Public Information Officer, I went with another member to my GP's surgery to give a talk about OA. Before I found OA, I remember sitting with a doctor, crying and saying I really needed help with my eating and weight and could he do anything as I had tried it all. He laughed at me and said I needed to eat less, exercise more and it was that simple. He doesn't work there any more so this was no revenge visit (!) but it's a very large practice and we spoke to around 20 doctors, 10 nurses and other healthcare professionals, maybe 40 people in all. I felt really overwhelmed at what OA had given me and very privileged to have planted a seed in that room. It was affecting to think that other compulsive eaters could have an opportunity of finding recovery in OA as I have done.

10. What other benefits have you found from any service you have given?

Doing service beyond group level has really taught me a lot. I am more able to say yes and also no and, most importantly, check with my Higher Power over which is the appropriate one for me in each situation.

Jacqueline, NSB Secretary

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

(please don't simply reply to the OAGB emails)

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

| DATE | EVENT | VENUE | CONTACT |
|--|--|---|--|
| Friday 15 th to Sunday 17 th March 2013 | Pleshey OA Retreat – <i>"Focus on Courage and Integrity"</i> | House of Retreat Pleshey Chelmsford Essex, CM3 1HA | Julie 07515 050 466/ 0208 555 4776 Sam 01296 681 747/ 07773 165 327 Vanessa 07725 461 805/ 01273 778 814 Sponsored by South and East England Intergroup |
| Saturday 23 rd March 2013 10.00 – 16.00 hours | Workshop on <i>"Abstinence, Awareness, Acceptance and Action"</i> | Fallowfield Baptist Church Wellington Road Manchester, M14 6EQ Enter Weller Ave Use back entrance | Suzi 07876 152 630 Sponsored by North West Intergroup |
| Saturday 13 th April 2013 10.00 – 16.00 hours | Workshop on <i>"Getting Our (Physical, Emotional and Spiritual) Needs Met as a Means to Recovery"</i> | St Mary's Parish Church, Great North Road, Eaton Socon, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 8GW (corner of B1048 and School Lane, opposite Tesco Express) | miriamwohl@hotmail.com (please put 'OA' in the subject line) Voicemail: 0116 240 4243/ Text: 07890 950 087 Sponsored by St Neots Group |
| Friday 10 th to Sunday 12 th May 2013 | Ilkley Weekend Retreat – <i>"Together we can do what we could never do alone"</i> | The Briery Retreat Centre Ilkley West Yorkshire LS29 9BW | Emma 01943 464 567 (before 9pm) emmaehayes@yahoo.co.uk Limited no. of places left Sponsored by North of England Intergroup |
| Friday 12 th to Sunday 14 th July 2013 | 13 th Annual OA Recovery Convention on <i>"Steps 10 & 11, Daily Inventory, Prayer & Meditation"</i> | The Hilton Metropole Hotel in Birmingham National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, B40 1PP | Rachel 01384 891 678 Email: contact@hoeconvention.org.uk Website: hoeconvention.org.uk Sponsored by Heart of England Intergroup |

Publicise your OA event for free!

Let SBS know if your group or other service body is organising a workshop or other OA event that you'd like advertised on this page. (Just send an email to stepbystep@oagb.org.uk with details of the date, event, venue and a contact number and/or email address, stating which registered OA group or other service body is sponsoring this event.)

*God, grant me the
serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
courage to change the
things I can and wisdom
to know the difference.*