

RESPONDING TO DISASTERS – “HOW CAN WE HELP?”

After disasters, the General Service Office (G.S.O.) is often inundated with questions about how to help our A.A. family in distressed areas. We hope the following frequently asked questions and answers prove useful.

Q. How does G.S.O. help A.A. groups in distressed areas?

A. The General Service Office is ready to support the efforts of local A.A. members in all types of disasters; hurricanes, fires, floods, earthquakes, mud slides, etc. Since it is rare for A.A. entities to own property (most local A.A. offices and groups rent their spaces), replenishing literature tends to be the main concern after a disaster.

G.S.O.'s experience is that we are often called upon to replace some lost literature, and we are happy to fulfill these requests. Thanks to continuous and generous contributions from A.A. groups in the United States and Canada year round, G.S.O. is ready to respond upon request.

It can be difficult to imagine what is needed immediately following a disaster. In many cases, the immediate needs are for survival items – food, water, shelter and medicine – which A.A. does not provide. It may take time – days, weeks, in some cases, months – for the local A.A. community to determine precisely what is needed to get the affected A.A. groups back on their feet.

So as not to interfere with emergency relief efforts, G.S.O. usually waits until the local conditions are stabilized and local A.A. members have an opportunity to let us know exactly what is needed. Our experience suggests that local A.A. groups and offices view the situation as a Twelfth Step opportunity and try to meet the needs of the local A.A. community before asking for help from G.S.O. or other A.A. entities.

Q. So what exactly does the General Service Office do in these cases?

A. G.S.O. contacts and offers support to intergroups, central offices, General Service Conference delegates and trustees in the affected communities. We wait to hear back from these offices and trusted servants, and gladly respond to their requests for help.

Q. Do you suggest that we send literature and money directly to the affected local A.A. offices?

A. In the instance where an A.A. entity asks for assistance, such as through an announcement placed on a local A.A. Website, it is up to each A.A. member or group to determine whether or how it wishes to respond. If your group decides to

offer help to an affected A.A. office, you may wish to contact them directly to determine the *current* need.

A.A.'s shared experience suggests that after a disaster, local A.A. offices and groups require very few contributions of money or complimentary literature. In many cases, local A.A. members are happy to work together to replace lost literature or office supplies before asking for help outside their local A.A. community. Local groups often make whatever repairs are necessary to their meeting places.

Regardless of your personal or group response, it is important to keep in mind that many of the affected areas may not have mail delivery, electricity, or available storage space after a disaster.

Q. Can I send money to G.S.O. and specify that it be used for disaster relief activities, such as replacement of literature?

A. Every A.A. dollar received at G.S.O. is used on a priority basis to carry A.A.'s message when a need is expressed. This includes responding to literature needs after disasters. G.S.O. does not accept A.A. funds that are earmarked for disaster relief or any other specific project, since G.S.O. needs to be able to respond whenever and wherever there is an expressed need.

Q. So what can I do to help?

A. Many A.A. members choose to support non-A.A. relief organizations in the wake of a disaster as private citizens and individuals. Members may feel compelled to reach out and assist with efforts to bring food, water, shelter and medicine into affected areas. Our experience suggests that many A.A. members in the past have helped as private citizens through relief organizations in just this way. In keeping with A.A.'s Traditions, these members do not give donations under the A.A. name or credit A.A. in any way.

Due to the challenges mentioned above, in most cases this office would not be able to list specific ways to help an A.A. community affected by a disaster. G.S.O. handles direct requests for literature from those affected. If a situation arose where the expressed need could not be met by G.S.O.'s resources alone, we would contact local A.A. groups and ask for additional help. This has not occurred to date.