

# How the Brisbane CSO Operates #1

What is CSO? What is CSO Not? How is CSO Structured? What does CSO do? What does CSO Not do? How does CSO relate to the rest of AA? The Name CSO Brisbane Inc.

## Part One

### What the CSO Is

#### ***The Purpose of Brisbane CSO***

The purpose of the Brisbane CSO is to assist in development of Alcoholics Anonymous in Queensland in line with the AA Traditions and Concepts; and to co-ordinate activities of AA Groups and Committees to give fitting expression to the collective group conscience.

#### ***The Functions of Brisbane CSO***

The functions of the Brisbane CSO are to provide the AA Helpline, Support AA Groups, Communicate with AA, Liaise with Outside Organisations, Have the right People and Place; be Financially Responsible, and Publish Information.

### What the CSO is Not

#### ***Not The Ultimate Authority of AA in Queensland***

The Brisbane CSO Representatives body is not the ultimate authority of AA in Queensland. Tradition Two says that a loving God is the ultimate Authority as he may be expressed through the group conscience. The Brisbane CSO Representatives are not the Group Conscience of AA in Queensland or even of AA in Brisbane. As the CSO Guidelines state "CSO's have no authority on their own account: they derive it from the participating groups. The Groups, of course, maintain effective control over the CSO operation through their representatives and 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition support. Just as our Delegates serve at our annual AA conference on behalf of the Groups, so do these local representatives reflect the Groups' will and conscience in the operations of the CSO." (GL-12 p.48) The Group Conscience of AA in Queensland is expressed through the General Service Structure, from Groups to Districts to Areas to the National Conference via GSR's, Area Delegates and the Regional Trustee. (This is explained in the Australian Service Manual p. 20-22 "The General Service Conference Structure".) Concept One says the AA groups hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services. "The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole fellowship". (p. 14) A CSO Representatives meeting cannot be the collective conscience of a state as it does not represent a state, but a locality as suggested in the Service Manual Guidelines (GL-12 Central Service Offices p.49). This would still be true if Brisbane CSO was the only CSO in Queensland (There are four CSO's in Queensland.)

#### ***Not Part of the General Service Structure***

The Structure of AA in Australia involves two arms of service: (1) The General Service Structure (Groups, Districts, Areas, Regions, Conference, National Office & the General Service Board and (2) CSO's (supporting by local Groups). The CSO's are not part of the General Service Structure but this does not put them outside of the AA structure. It does not prevent co-operation between the two arms of service, in fact it is strongly encouraged "CSO's and Area committees are complimentary rather than competitive AA operations" (GL-12 CSO's p. 50). Brisbane CSO usually appoints an Area Liaison position whenever numbers on the Steering Committee allow for it. This person attends Area Assemblies and reports on the activities of the CSO to the Area's. Area Assembly minutes are regularly sent to Brisbane CSO.

Regular contact is maintained by Brisbane CSO with the General Service Structure at all levels. The Brisbane CSO is in contact with National Office in regards to literature, website, and service issues. We also liaise with the Regional Trustee and each of the Area Delegates. We liaise with Area secretaries and Registrars in updating information about members, groups and districts.

### ***Not an AA “Head Office”***

Sometimes AA members misunderstand the role of CSO and have referred to it as ‘Head Office’ as though it had some authority. Some members have viewed the Steering Committee as way to ‘change AA’. Occasionally members bring complaints about groups or members to the CSO expecting the CSO to take disciplinary action. When this happens we try to clarify the role of CSO as existing to serve the groups that created it and support it. We try to educate the fellowship about the ‘upside down’ pyramid and the two arms of service by including diagrams of the service structure in the hand-outs at CSO Reps meeting. (These are based on the diagrams in ‘The Illustrated 12 Concepts’, ‘Inside AA Australia’ pamphlets and ‘The Australian Service Manual’ p. 24.) Many members have appreciated getting a clearer picture of the structure of AA this way.

## **How is CSO Structured?**

### ***CSO Group Representation***

The Brisbane CSO Representatives represent the groups that support it (mostly metropolitan Brisbane groups). In Queensland the Group Representatives who attend CSO meetings are called CSO Representatives, not Delegates, so there is no confusion with Area Delegates (who are the Area Representatives to the National Conference). There was some confusion between the terms ‘Group Representative’ (GR’s) and ‘Group Service Representatives’ (GSR’s). So in 2006 we changed the name of this service position to ‘CSO Reps’ in line with the AA service literature. Currently about 70% of Brisbane AA Groups are registered with the Brisbane CSO (not compulsory for meetings listing). There are 104 Groups or 157 Meetings in Brisbane and 274 Groups or 414 Meetings in Queensland. Many non-metropolitan groups also choose to support Brisbane CSO, as is their prerogative, by way of registrations, donations and literature purchases.

### ***Average Attendance at Brisbane CSO Reps meetings***

The quorum (required attendance before a meeting can proceed) never varies for Brisbane CSO Representatives it is always 20 CSO Reps (group representatives) and Steering Committee members before business can proceed. As to total attendance, the average for Brisbane CSO Representatives meetings in the past year is 30 per meeting.

### ***The Entity of “Brisbane CSO Inc.”***

The Central Service Office of Brisbane is an incorporated association as per the suggestion in the Service Manual Guidelines (GL-12 Central Service Offices p.49). There is only one entity, the incorporated association. The constitution of the Brisbane CSO describes the structure of the Incorporated Association as having two classes of membership: CSO Representatives and Steering Committee members. The CSO Representatives are elected by their groups and attend a quarterly CSO meeting. From among their number are elected up to nine members of the Steering Committee which is a Management Committee of the Incorporate Association. This committee makes decisions on how CSO is run (not on how AA as a whole is run). Thus positions on the Brisbane CSO Management Committee are made up of elected representatives.

The Brisbane CSO Steering Committee meets monthly to discuss the running of the CSO and to take various portfolios of service. Each sub-committee of the CSO (Helpline, Pathfinder) is chaired by a member of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee must also comprise a Chairperson, a Treasurer and a Secretary (which is the Office Manager).

*Rodney Holmes, CSO Brisbane Office Manager.*

# How the Brisbane CSO Operates #2

What is CSO? What is CSO Not? How is CSO Structured? What does CSO do? What does CSO Not do? How does CSO relate to the rest of AA? The Name CSO Brisbane Inc.

## Part Two

### What does CSO do?

#### ***Include AA Traditions in the Brisbane CSO Objects***

The legally binding Constitution of the Brisbane CSO requires the entity to observe the AA Traditions & Concepts: “The objects for which the Association is established are to assist the expansion and development of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous within the Association's area of responsibility in the state of Queensland in accordance with the Traditions and Concepts of Alcoholics Anonymous”. This has proven to be the simplest, most effective and least controversial way of resolving issues. It is also required to observe the law in regards to Incorporated Associations which includes having a constitution, an AGM and an annual audit of its accounts. From the literature and experience it's clear that this ‘principled’ approach is sometimes rejected, however clearly not universally rejected. “Unless each AA member follows to the best of his ability our suggested Twelve Steps to recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant. His drunkenness and dissolution are not penalties inflicted by people in authority; they result from his personal disobedience to spiritual principles. The same stern threat applies to the group itself. Unless there is approximate conformity to AA's Twelve Traditions, the group, too, can deteriorate and die. So we of AA do obey spiritual principles, first because we must, and ultimately because we love the kind of life such obedience brings. Great suffering and great love are AA's disciplinarians; we need no other.” (‘12 Steps & 12 Traditions’ p. 174)

So we of Brisbane CSO strive to obey the spiritual principles in the Traditions, Concepts & Guidelines, first because we must, and ultimately because we love the kind of CSO such obedience brings. It would seem incongruous to quote from one part of the AA service literature in support of an action and yet dismiss it elsewhere if inconvenient.

#### ***Rely on Guidance and Learn from Mistakes***

Running the Brisbane CSO is much like running a small business with all the ensuing complex requirements, with the added challenge and joy of the majority of its ‘customers’ and all of its staff, paid and volunteer, being in recovery. At Brisbane CSO, ‘keeping it simple’ means checking the AA principles (Traditions, Concepts & Guidelines) for guidance. In the great majority of cases painful trial and error has suggested a pathway forward.

The Brisbane CSO exists to serve the groups that created it and continue to support it with time (over 100 volunteers) and money (70% of Brisbane Groups contribute). The Brisbane CSO Constitution requires it to be guided by the Group Conscience of the CSO Reps informed by Conference-Approved Service Literature. Decisions have been reversed by this Group Conscience process when the minority voice (Concept 5) was heard and Conference-Approved Literature was found to have clear guidance different to previous decisions. Examples of such reversals in recent years have included: Sale of non-conference approved literature, deletion of meetings and inclusion of the words “Alcoholics Anonymous” in the registered name of the Brisbane CSO.

#### ***Employ & Pay Staff***

In line with Tradition 8, Brisbane CSO employs a full-time special worker who is the Office Manager and Secretary with a casual relief Office Manager filling in for holidays, sick leave and time off in lieu. The Office Manager receives a gross salary of \$36,400 and the casual Relief Office Manager earns an average of \$4,000 per year. Total payroll expenses including superannuation, leave and Work cover for 2005/2006 was \$44,000.

## ***Define Staff Duties***

The Brisbane CSO Office Manager is required to have a strong understanding of the AA Steps, Traditions and Concepts. His duties are set out in the Position Description and detailed in the Operating Procedures Manual:

- Ensure phone calls to the office or 12-step phone line are answered and referred to appropriate AA groups or individuals.
- Recruit, train and organize the relief Office Manager & roster of phone volunteers during office hours. Assist with after hour's phone roster.
- Understand and control financial matters; book-keeping, paying expenses, preparing invoices, banking, stock control and preparation of financial reports for the steering committee.
- Take & distribute minutes for monthly Steering Committee (SC) & quarterly CSO Reps meetings. Submit report to SC with correspondence, info on leases, insurance, repairs, etc.
- Handle appropriately requests from outside organisations asking for information on AA (but is not the spokesperson for AA).
- Keeps the local meetings list up to date in co-operation with Your Pathfinder Committee
- Stock, sell & mail literature and related items to AA groups and individuals
- Maintain the monthly CSO Newsletter, distributed through Your Pathfinder
- Handle all administrative duties in the office such as correspondence in and out, filing.
- Maintain up-to-date contact database of SC members, CSO Reps, and key service appointees.
- Provide needed information to AA groups, General Service Structure or other CSO's as needed
- Keep the office clean, organised and presentable

## ***Manage Volunteers***

The Brisbane CSO co-ordinates the service work of 60 phone volunteers, 40 school speakers and 20 committee members. The committees of the Brisbane are the Steering Committee (maximum 9 members), the 12-Step helpline sub-committee, and the Your Pathfinder magazine sub-committee. Other CSO portfolios include PI (Schools), Treatment Facilities and Fund-raising.

## ***Sell Conference-Approved Literature***

Brisbane CSO stocks only conference-approved literature in line with AA Guidelines (GL-02 p.10), as well as some non-literature items such as medallions and jewellery. Literature prices are set to the same level as the retail price charged by National Office. Total turnover of literature in 2005 / 2006 was \$35,800 at a net profit of \$7,600. Literature is sold to individuals, AA groups and outside organisations, over the counter and by mail all over Queensland.

## ***List Groups and Meetings***

There are 100 AA groups in Brisbane holding 150 meetings. 75% of these Brisbane groups choose to be registered with the Brisbane CSO (not a pre-requisite for listing in the meetings list). The Brisbane CSO manages the meetings list for the monthly publication 'Your Pathfinder', and is custodian of the Queensland portion of the National AA website meetings database, updating the details of 270 groups holding 400 meetings throughout Queensland.

## ***Manage Contact Database***

In addition to managing the Queensland meetings list, Brisbane CSO also manages a database of AA contacts based on its annual group registration process, Pathfinder magazine subscriptions, service volunteer contact and regular interaction with groups. This database has 1,300 individuals, 270 group contacts, 275 school contacts and 150 other outside organisation contacts. Once a week we e-mail out to our 350 email contacts an updated version of the monthly CSO News.

*Rodney Holmes, CSO Brisbane Office Manager.*

# How the Brisbane CSO Operates #3

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## Part Three

### What does CSO Not do?

#### ***Not Participate in Advisory Committees***

Brisbane CSO is often contacted by outside organisations in related fields to alcoholism treatment. We take care to check and observe Traditions 6 (non-affiliation) & 10 (outside issues & controversies). Also in line with Tradition 5 (Primary Purpose) Brisbane CSO would decline any invitation to participate as AA representatives in a government advisory body, even as observers (see pamphlet "How AA members Co-operate with Professionals" p. 14.) This would imply an affiliation even if no opinion was expressed on an outside issue. Of course any individual member is free to do whatever they wish, as long as they do not speak for AA. As the pamphlet "Speaking at Non-AA Meetings" says when speaking at a non-AA meeting we "mention the fact that we speak for ourselves, not for AA as a whole" (p. 20).

#### ***Not Receive Outside Donations and Funding***

The constitution of the Brisbane CSO states that it may "Sell, exchange, lease, charge or otherwise dispose of or deal with all or any part of any assets so required;". It may also "Buy and sell for profit any publications, literature, photographs, records, tape and video recordings and the like as the Association shall deem appropriate." Our constitution does not provide for it to be able to receive any donations from outside of AA. Only donations from AA members, AA groups, AA committees or AA events may be received. Donations from outside entities have been returned. This principle would be followed regardless of the needs of Brisbane CSO. In 1999 the cost of rental premises became too high and the Brisbane CSO had to relocate. No outside donation was requested or received to alleviate this situation. If the telephone system or furniture was in disrepair the CSO would make these needs known only to the AA Fellowship not any outside entity.

#### ***Not Buy Property***

The constitution of the Brisbane CSO only provides for it to "Lease or rent premises which may be necessary for furthering these objects;". It does not own any property. It rents a small office space from Brisbane City Council in the inner southern suburb of Annerley. It is a five-year rental lease that includes requirements to do maintenance work on the building in addition to the rent. The Office equipment includes computers, copier, printer, fax, phones, and storage space for literature and archives.

This follows the suggestion in the Guidelines for CSO's: "The question also arises whether to buy or rent the premises. Traditionally, AA does not own property 'lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.' (Tradition 6) Experience also indicates that it is not fair or wise to commit AA members of the future to financial obligations for which they have not initially assumed responsibility. So renting a facility has proved best." (GL-12 Central Service Offices p. 46)

#### ***Not Delete Meetings from the Queensland Meetings List***

The February 2007 CSO Reps meeting had almost double the regular attendance due to the controversy surrounding the deletion and re-inclusion of a meeting from the Pathfinder meetings list. Brisbane CSO learnt a lot from this controversy. One thing we learnt was to more clearly state our Standing Orders which provide ground rules for the CSO Reps meetings. But the primary

learning was around Concept 12. We did discover, thanks to the minority voice, that conference-approved literature had plenty to say on this issue of deleting meetings.

After studying the conference-approved literature members of the Steering Committee realized that there was no justification for deleting a group for breaking traditions. Concept 12 makes it clear that no-one can take action against a group for breaking the traditions. The Steering Committee voted to overturn the previous decision and the Group was reinstated. A letter describing the situation was sent to GSO New York and to the General Service Board.

At one point in the considerations of the Brisbane CSO Steering Committee we reviewed what an AA group is, as described in the Group Handbook on page 24. We considered whether we could make this a prerequisite for listing in the Queensland meetings list. However it was noted that there is no statement in the Handbook that a group not following these suggestions can or should be de-listed. The only statement about de-listing is on page 19 that “family meetings and alcohol and pill meetings not be listed in our AA directories”.

Other references we found useful were the long form of Tradition 4 (AA Big Book p. 563), short form of Concept 12 (AA Big Book p.575), ‘Language of the Heart’ on Tradition 3 (p. 33, 34, 38) and 4 (p. 81), ‘AA Tradition How it Developed’ pamphlet on ‘Will AA ever have a Personal Government?’ (p. 33, 34) and Concept 12 Warranty Five in the 12 Concepts Book (p. 69, 71).

### ***Not Distribute Donations to the 60 / 30 / 10 Plan***

Brisbane CSO does not re-distribute donations to the 60 / 30 / 10 plan. When a cheque is received that is made out to another AA entity, it is sometimes forwarded to that entity if possible otherwise it is returned to sender.

The Brisbane CSO carries both the “Group Donation Plans” and the “Self Support” pamphlets in stock. Both of these describe a range of optional plans that Groups may choose to use to distribute their surplus funds to.

To facilitate the informed distribution of surplus group funds the addresses for the 60 / 30 / 10 plan are published each month on ‘Your Pathfinder’ making it clear that Brisbane CSO is only one example of a CSO that a Queensland group can send their funds to.

Total Income to Brisbane CSO in 2005/06 was \$48,630 made up of Group Donations (\$39,600), Personal Donations (\$13,000), Literature Sales (\$7,600 net) and fund-raising (\$1,300). 70% of Brisbane groups donated to Brisbane CSO in 2005/06, 55% of Brisbane groups donated more than once in 2005/06. Brisbane CSO continues to provide its services (including meetings listings) to all AA groups regardless of whether they are registered, contributing or buying literature.

***Rodney Holmes, CSO Brisbane Office Manager.***

# How the Brisbane CSO Operates #4

What is CSO? What is CSO Not? How is CSO Structured? What does CSO do? What does CSO Not do? How does CSO relate to the rest of AA? The Name CSO Brisbane Inc.

## Part Four

### How does CSO relate to the rest of AA?

#### ***No Competition with other CSO's or AA Entities***

A number of CSO's have been established in South East Queensland over the years. (Brisbane CSO dates back to 1956.) There have also been CSO's in Toowoomba and the Gold Coast (ongoing) and even a second CSO in Brisbane at one stage. The guidelines allow for CSO's to be established whenever population centres allow groups to be able to afford them. Whilst Tradition Four would suggest consultation with existing CSO's that may be affected, there is no sense in which another CSO is seen as 'competing'. (See Service Manual Section M-02 p. 4 in regards rivalry). As the CSO Guidelines say about Area Committees: "CSO's and Area committees are complimentary rather than competitive AA operations" (GL-12 CSO's p. 50). The same applies to different CSO's. They are run autonomously but we share information especially meeting information.

Brisbane CSO publishes Your Pathfinder magazine on behalf of all of AA in Queensland. In it we list all the Queensland meetings, 12 Step Helplines, District Contacts and the other 3 CSO's. We also list the meetings that meet at the same location as the Gold Coast CSO. These meetings are distinct from the Gold Coast CSO.

#### ***Relationship with QYPAA***

Brisbane CSO has a good co-operative relationship with QYPAA (Queensland Young People in AA convention) despite being in two different arms of service. QYPAA is part of the General Service Structure, operating as a sub-committee of Area C North-Eastern Region. The Area underwrites QYPAA and the QYPAA chairperson reports to the Area C Assembly every quarter. Brisbane CSO co-operates fully with QYPAA, advertising their events and fund-raisers and providing space in our office for the sale of their merchandise. There is no confusion of liability between Brisbane CSO & QYPAA. Brisbane CSO has no authority over QYPAA to direct them to carry disclaimers of affiliation, (none are necessary), nor any authority to discuss dropping the word "Queensland" from QYPAA.

#### ***Advertising AA Events not Affiliated with Brisbane CSO***

Brisbane CSO routinely advertises events and meetings that have various combinations of the words 'Brisbane', 'Queensland' and 'Alcoholics Anonymous' in their titles without any problem. None of these have any appearance of affiliation as they are all autonomous groups or events within the General Service Structure.

The Correctional Centres Committee used to meet under the auspices of the Brisbane CSO. It now is constituted as an Area C Sub-committee. Brisbane CSO continues to advertise it's meeting with no requirement for any disclaimer about the CC Committee being previously affiliated with Brisbane CSO.

#### ***Clubs in AA***

Whilst the Guidelines (GL-13 'Clubs') suggest that there is no such thing as an "AA Club" they do acknowledge that Clubs in AA are here to stay. They also suggest that Clubs should observe the 12 Traditions despite not being AA Groups. This includes not accepting outside donations (including from Al-Anon). There are no Clubs in AA in Queensland, although the Guidelines provide for their existence. We currently rent premises from the City Council but could rent them from anyone,

including a Club in AA, provided the two entities were clearly distinct. The Guidelines also suggests that contributions from Clubs not be received by AA as it was too difficult to be sure that money received was only from AA members. However AA meetings that meet in the clubs may donate just like nay other AA meeting (GL-13 p. 56).

### ***Public Liability Insurance***

It is clear in the correspondence from National Office (including their registration forms) how Group coverage for Public Liability Insurance is maintained. It is maintained by registration with National Office not any fixed amount of donation. The registration form asks what percentage the group is willing to contribute from surplus funds; it does not dictate any amount.

Brisbane CSO carries its own Public Liability Insurance (as well as Contents, Worker's Comp & Volunteer Insurance) separate to the Public Liability Insurance policy held by the National Office that covers AA groups. Each CSO makes their own arrangements in this regard. There is no implication of any liability on the Brisbane CSO by any other CSO's or Groups.

### ***National Office is not a "Warehouse for Literature"***

Education is possible to help members understand the role of the National Office. The simplest way is to refer members to the pamphlet "Your National Office" or the chapter in the Service Manual "The National Office" (Section 10). A list of the functions of the National Office includes:

- |  |                                       |                                    |
|--|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Conference-approved books & pamphlets | 5. Relations with alcoholism agencies | 10. Idea exchange for CSOs         |
| 2. Help with Group problems              | 6. Public information                 | 11. Anonymity breaks               |
| 3. Special help to new Groups            | 7. General Service Conference         | 12. Conventions and Forums         |
| 4. AA overseas                           | 8. General Service Board              | 13. Guidelines                     |
|  | 9. Self-support                       | 14. AA archives                    |
|  |                                       | 15. Loners Internationalists Aust. |

### ***The Name "CSO Brisbane Inc."***

#### ***The Name "CSO of AA Brisbane Inc."***

When the Brisbane CSO was first incorporated back in 1990, the incorporated name was "Brisbane Central Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous Inc." It was discovered some time after that this registered name went against the AA Guidelines, which say "The name "Alcoholics Anonymous" should not appear in the corporate title – this name ought to be the sole property of AA as a whole." (P. 49) So we took responsibility to change our name. An amendment to our constitution was approved by the CSO Reps and the Queensland Justice Department to change our registered name to simply "Central Service Office, Brisbane Inc." as it remains to this day.

#### ***The Name "AA Queensland"***

Our monthly journal (Your Pathfinder) is published by the Brisbane CSO as a service for the whole of Queensland. When designing the Brisbane CSO website we wanted to make it a website that served all of Queensland (just like our monthly magazine). However, we decided against naming that website "AA Queensland" as it might imply that the Brisbane CSO is all of AA in Queensland. We made the important distinction that we as a local Central Service Office are not AA as a whole for all Queensland.

If we were to adopt a name like "AA Queensland" people may think that Brisbane CSO represents AA in Queensland, which it does not do, as it is not in the General Service Structure. There is no need for any other AA entities to be banned from using either AA or Queensland in their name. Brisbane CSO doesn't own the word 'Queensland' any more than it owns the word 'Brisbane'. There is no authority in Brisbane CSO or the CSO Representatives over the whole of AA in Queensland.

*Rodney Holmes, CSO Brisbane Office Manager.*