Plain Language Big Book- the Journey So Far

Some history…

- Discussion at the 66th General Service Conference in 2016 resulted in an additional committee consideration* that:

"the need for 'plain-language' recovery literature be explored by the Trustees' Literature Committee as a way to make the life-saving message of Alcoholics Anonymous more accessible."

*(*An item that was discussed by a Conference committee, but with no action taken or recommendation made to the Conference as a whole. Serves as a suggestion to the corresponding trustees' committee.)*

- That exploration led to the creation of subcommittees for *Researching Issues, Possible Tools and Access to the Book*, known as RIPTAB-I and RIPTAB-II.

- In RIPTAB-I, they looked at established literacy levels to guide discussions of what language comprehension skills a reader - a prospective member - would need to comprehend the book, Alcoholics Anonymous.
- And they reviewed what other simplified “recovery” materials were being used by members to meet those needs.

- The subcommittee concluded that literacy concerns indeed reflected potential accessibility barriers and it learned how this can be related to factors such as education, ethnicity, English as first language, reading disabilities, brain injuries and incarceration.

- At the ***70th General Service Conference in 2020***, the Conference Literature Committee requested the trustees make available the RIPTAB presentation. A video of that presentation was produced and distributed with a request for feedback.

- RIPTAB-II was tasked with continuing the work which involved gathering further information about issues related to fellowship requests regarding the language of the Big Book.

- A progress report was then forwarded to the **2021 Conference Literature Committee** focused on accessibility and relatability of the Big Book in terms of reaching a wider demographic of alcoholics.

- The idea of a new book was not meant to change or replace the Big Book, but rather **to overcome barriers so the AA message might reach more suffering alcoholics**.

- At the **71st General Service Conference** in April 2021, there was a Conference Advisory Action which recommended:
- *"that a draft version of the book, Alcoholics Anonymous, be translated into **plain** and **simple** language and be developed in a way that is **accessible** and **relatable** to as wide of an audience as possible and that a progress report or draft be brought back to the 2022 Conference Literature Committee."*

A quick translation detour…

- Current translation practices
- No English/Plain Language dictionary
- U.S. - Plain Writing Act of 2010
- Government of Canada' Directive on the Management of Communications

Post 71st General Service Conference…

- In July 2021, at the meeting of the Trustees Literature Committee, a subcommittee was created to track the development of the Plain Language Big Book. Noting the Conference Committee's request that the book be *"developed in a way that is **accessible** and **relatable** to as wide of an audience as possible."*

- The subcommittee adopted the name “TABB” (Tools to Access the Big Book) and worked with the AAWS Publishing Department to review potential writers for the project.

- A formal “**Request for Information**” was sent out to vendors.

- It was focused on writers with experience in the fields of health, spirituality, self-help, or education.

From the RFI…

- **<u>Goals/Outcomes</u>**:
- "We seek a full plain language translation of an abridged *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The final work product must be accessible to readers at a **fifth-grade reading level**."

- "The translation as a whole **must capture the welcoming and inclusive spirit** of Alcoholics Anonymous and **inspire a sense of belonging and hope** in the alcoholic seeking help."

The response…

- There were 16 affirmative responses.
- Of those, some were individuals, some were partnerships, some were firms. Some were AA members.
- The TABB subcommittee plus three members from AAWS Publishing (**all AA members**) - selected six vendors which were then hired to translate Chapter 5 and, if possible, a few select passages.
- The samples were independently read and ranked by TABB and the Publishing team members and a writer was chosen.

- While the selection of the writer was finalized in January 2022, further negotiations lead to the contract being signed in May 2022.

- The subcommittee recommended that providing anonymity to the writer was in everyone's best interest.

- The writer asked not to be given specific coaching on certain passages until the review process. They didn't want to be over-guided and as a result, get stifled.

- The subcommittee established a regular ongoing review process of the writer's work.

Heading towards the 72nd GSC…

- In a break with previous practice, and to obtain early feedback, the TABB subcommittee recommended sharing unedited samples from the writer's first attempt to translate the text with the Conference Literature Committee.

- The Trustees Literature Committee recommended that the samples be shared with all Conference members.

After the 72nd Conference…

- I joined the subcommittee in 2022. We met several times. Some of those meetings were joint meetings with Publishing and with the writer.
- As chapters came in, we reviewed and provided suggestions for changes, with an expectation of additional rounds of refinements to ensure the writing was faithful to the guidance and the Big Book.

Heading towards the 73rd GSC…

- Trustees Literature Committee recommended that all Conference members should have access to the completed Chapters 1 through 6.
- Given the fellowship's strong interest in this project, the subcommittee gave much consideration to how the need for maintaining confidentiality could be balanced with the need for unity and transparency.

The Reading Room…

- To ensure confidentiality in the process it was decided to create a controlled environment: a designated room; with no cellphones or recording devices allowed; and monitored by members of the Trustees Literature Committee.

- We worked with the Trustees Conference Committee to schedule hours for each Conference member during Conference week.

- Afterwards, a sharing session was held, and Conference members gave their impressions and suggestions on the first 6 chapters.

Post 73rd General Service Conference…

- Feedback from the Conference members provided to the writer and incorporated in the draft text.
- The subcommittee has reviewed and provided suggestions on the complete text.
- Another reading room with the full draft is planned for the 74th General Service Conference in April 2024.

In closing…

- Comments from the Conference members:
  - Not too impressed with the samples from last year. This week the book makes sense. I am convinced that we need to see this through to the finish line.
  - Was against it but I have evolved, struck by how beautiful and respectful it was. This is the most loving thing we have done for the still suffering alcoholics.
  - Lots of fear in my area, thank you for all the work to make this week possible, I think this tool will save lives please make it available in as many formats as possible as soon as possible.

Thank you!