SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Safety Committee of ACA UK Intergroup was set up in February 2021. Its purpose is to endeavour to integrate the work of WSO on safety issues into ACA UK as well as to provide guidance and support in relation to safety matters within in the fellowship. The members of the Committee are currently Mark S and Patricia L. We welcome inquiries from those interested in the work of this committee and who would like to give service.

1. WEB SITE

The Safety Committee has a web page on the ACA UK intergroup web site which contains links to ACA safety materials as produced by WSO. These include materials from the Addressing Predatory Behaviour Committee, the Meeting and Service Safety Ad Hoc Committee and relevant links to the Best Practices Members’ Toolbox. The web site also includes personal stories of those who have experienced safety issues in ACA meetings, including those who have experienced predatory behaviour, homophobia and other forms of acting out. It remains the intention of the committee to continue to update the web site as the work of the various WSO committees is ready to disseminate more widely. We encourage all meetings to consider adopting the ACA Tent Card on addressing predatory behaviour in their Group Consciences, the link to which in on the Safety Committee web page.

1. COVID SAFETY

After some consideration, we decided against adopting specific suggestions in relation to Covid safety. The difficulty for us was that the situation regarding Covid regulations, or lack of them, tended to change with a good deal of frequency so that any guidance we could provide would become dated quite quickly. At the time of writing, the regulatory regime regarding Covid restrictions has relaxed somewhat. Nevertheless, it remains the case that most venues require meetings that return face-to-face to conduct their own risk assessments to mitigate against the risk of transmission. There is no ‘one size fits all’ response to what is required as that would vary from venue to venue depending on size, layout etc. In addition, the conscience of the groups in relation to, for instance, the wearing of masks when it was no longer a criminal offence not to wear one in indoor public spaces, would vary. The attendees of some meetings could feel strongly that masks should continue to be worn whereas others would not. Whatever the position, we took the view that it would be helpful for members seeking to attend face-to-face meetings to know in advance the position that a particular meeting took in relation to Covid mitigations so that they could make informed decisions on whether to attend. With that in mind, we suggested that it would be helpful for meetings to publish on their web site entry any GC decisions in this regard.

One meeting sought guidance on whether they could ask that attendees be vaccinated before attending the meeting. This raised concerns about issues such as the protection of members’ privacy and the appropriate storage of medical data on individuals as this could give rise to issues under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

1. MEETING SAFETY

The Safety Committee was approached by an individual who had been excluded from her home group on the grounds of safety. The matter was discussed at intergroup, and the feedback was that meetings were entitled under the traditions to ask individuals not to attend groups if their attendance compromised the safety of the meeting.

1. ‘ONLY’ MEETINGS

There has been an ongoing debate within the fellowship about ‘only’ meetings. This was prompted by the listing of a meeting on the WSO meeting web site that purported to be ‘heterosexual only’ and the decision taken by WSO to delist that meeting, in part on the basis that such meetings could unlawfully discriminate against members of the LGBTQ+ community. It was suggested that there was a danger of a ‘white only’ meeting being set up. In response, WSO set up a series of Town Halls to assist in the development of traditions-based guidance on the subject of ‘only’ meetings.

The Safety Committee took the view that it would be prudent for IG UK to adopt the same interim position as that taken by WSO if asked to list meetings that purported to be ‘heterosexual only’ or ‘white only’ on the ACA UK web site. The Safety Committee does not offer a view on the lawfulness of such meetings other than to note that the law on equality in the United Kingdom may differ from that in California where WSO is incorporated. However, establishing and publicising meetings that are not directed towards providing a healing space for those seeking recovery from identity-based trauma based on historical disadvantage/discrimination potentially raises reputational issues for ACA. A ‘white only’ meeting may well fall within the second limb of tradition 4 “each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups **or ACA as a whole”** (emphasis added) given the potential reputational damage to the fellowship that such meetings may cause.

Nevertheless, the committee does support ‘only’ meetings for members of disadvantaged or underrepresented communities who are seeking to heal from identity-based trauma caused by historical (and sometimes current) prejudice and discrimination. ‘Only’ meetings have a long history in the 12-step community, and moving accounts from some of the early pioneers of these types of meetings are readily available online. Men ‘only’ and women ‘only’ meetings are listed both on the ACA WSO meetings list as well as the UK online meetings list. They are also to be found in meeting lists of a large number of other 12 step fellowships. What became apparent to us from attending the Town Halls was that some members of historically disadvantaged groups (i.e. LGBTQ+, PoC) felt unsafe sharing identity-based trauma in mainstream meetings. Intergroup UK facilitated an extraordinary meeting on this issue and opinion appeared fairly evenly divided on whether such meetings should be ‘only’ meetings or ‘focus’ meetings. In addition, some women have been exposed to gender-based violence so extreme that they would feel unsafe attending a meeting where men are present. A summary of this meeting is included below.

We are acutely aware of instances where homophobic or racist remarks have been made in meetings and the individuals affected by them felt they had little option but to leave the meeting as it no longer felt a safe space for them. It is important that ACAs feel safe and held in the fellowship while they heal from their childhood trauma and that experiences of prejudice are not recreated in the spaces where they have come to seek recovery. ‘Only’ meetings provide a safe space for this healing with others who readily identify with their experience. As the discussion developed, it became clear that at its heart was the protection of the diverse communities served by ACA, and we took the view that support for these meetings was more appropriately provided by REA UK who have drafted a proposal for ‘only’ meetings to include in the ballot for the ABC should they wish it.

1. MEETINGS FOR MINORS

The Safety Committee was approached by someone seeking to provide support for minors and at the time of writing, this issue is currently being discussed by Intergroup. We note that work with minors raises issues of safeguarding that would need careful consideration.

1. ISSUES RAISED BY THE MEDICATION COMMITTEE

The Safety Committee was asked to complete the work of the Mediation Committee regarding the use made by speakers at ACA meetings and workshops of these platforms to promote their professional activities. Intergroup UK took the view that such a practice should be discouraged. The suggested amendments to the text that appears on the WSO events page is replicated below. At the time of writing, this has yet to be finalised by Intergroup UK.

Patricia L

Mark S

October 2021

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF ACA UK EXTRAORDINARY MEETING ON ‘ONLY’ MEETINGS

1. Concern that only meetings preclude attendance for those who may not meet the ‘criteria’ and that this might be isolating for ACAs.  Also concern that this was not in keeping with the spirit of 12 step fellowship.  Should be united by our common purpose (seeking recovery).  This is especially the case in relation to a newcomer/those struggling who live in remote locations where other meetings are not easily sourced.  Others took the view that with the proliferation of online meetings, sourcing other meetings should not be an issue

2. In relation to male only/female only meetings discussions re: safety.  The view was expressed that in relation to these meetings, that a woman showing up to a man’s meeting or a man showing up to a women’s meeting effectively changed the nature of the meeting.  This would be unfair on those who had signed up for a particular type of meeting.  In addition, the extremely serious nature of some of the gender-based abuse experienced by some women at the women’s meeting means that they would feel extremely unsafe in a mixed meeting.  A man who is not a newcomer showing up at a women’s meeting could be seen as an act of aggression.  The BRB and Fellowship manual (draft) talk about safety in meetings and it is permissible under the traditions to ask those who are disrupting a meeting to leave (common welfare comes first).

3.  Mixed meetings are not good at dealing with homophobic/sexist/racist micro-aggressions when they occur.

4. Some felt that the issue could be remedied by having ‘focus’ meetings as opposed to ‘only'.  Others felt that this was not adequate. Opinion on this point seemed divided. Alternatively, the fellowship could decide to refuse to list meetings influenced by prejudice (heterosexual or white only) and not throw out ’the baby with the bath water’.

5. There was a concern not to interfere with group autonomy. The point was made that the discussion re: only meetings was to do with the listing of meetings (so the meetings could in theory continue even if they are not listed on the web site).

APPENDIX 2: WORK OF THE MEDICATION AND RECOVERY COMMITTEE

This is the text as it appears on the WSO web site (https://acawso.org/events/). The suggested addition appears in red, and we could just add the same text to our own site.

**“Please note the following:**

In accordance with our 6th Tradition we will only post events sponsored by registered ACA Groups, Intergroups, or Regions. In keeping with traditions  5, 10 and 11, we would ask that speakers at ACA events and meetings not use these platforms to promote their professional activities.

Please do not include full personal names, personal emails or phone numbers in respect of our 11th tradition of anonymity.”