

Below is an **UPDATED** summary of what has been discussed at the Intergroup Business meetings regarding how we handle our 24-hour helpline after regular business hours (updated November 3, 2020)

**Why are other options being explored?**

- Call volume is down: often times we get 0 calls for an entire weekend
- Volunteers miss calls: missed calls go to their VM generally, and for a 24-hour helpline this is bad business
- Volunteers are sometimes not available for their shift (time consuming for office manager and telephone chair trying to find a replacement)
- Nights/weekends calls are primarily information (questions about meeting locations and times) and only about *1-3 calls each month* are actual Twelve-step calls.

**What do other near-by Intergroups do after hours?**

**Des Moines uses an answering service.**

**Peoria (and Pekin area) does essentially what we do:** Volunteers sign up and answer the phone nights/weekends like we do (each *group* is responsible for getting volunteers for their week).

**Iowa City uses an answering service:** They actually no longer have an Intergroup Office and have been using an answering service for about 3 years (same service Cedar Rapids uses).

**I asked groups to discuss and consider 3 options at their business meetings:**

- 1) **Answering Service:** Flexible, able to tailor their service according to our needs, we provide them with our website information so they can answer simple information calls (meeting locations and times). If/when someone calls with questions that only **we** can answer, for instance to discuss their drinking, the answering service takes their first name/ph#, puts the caller on hold, calls someone on the 12-step list we've provided, and then connects the two together. At \$50/month for 60 minutes of call time (+.89/each minute over 60), it isn't a terrible expense.  
**Discussion took place regarding confidentiality concerns:** Answering service deals with doctors/patients and has to adhere to HIPAA laws, all reps/operators are well-trained before they ever take a call and have a clear understanding of the importance of upholding the confidences of not only the callers but also our list of AA members. Our 12-step list contains first name/last initial only and ph#. We would be allowed a 2-week free trial to help determine which package we should start with. Free trial also gives us access to their web portal allowing us to see the # of calls, the time of each call, and how long each call took to handle.
- 2) **Voicemail:** Our current phone company, Vonage, has a VM service. When VM is set up and someone leaves a message, a notification can be sent to an email address (up to 5) or phone number (up to 5) alerting us we have a Voicemail, so the call can be returned immediately. The outgoing message could direct callers to the [aaquadcities.org](http://aaquadcities.org) website for simple information calls about meeting locations and times, and if they want to speak with someone directly, the message might ask for first name and phone# and someone will return their call.
- 3) **Leave it as-is for now.** There is no motion at this time; we can revisit this again once groups are back to meeting in-person, are able to hold business meetings, and contributions are back up.

**NOTE: As of Nov-2-2020, most feedback points to leaving the phone service as-is. The comments were filled with emotion and members are very passionate about having a member of AA answer the phone 24/7.**

**UPDATE GIVEN AT NOV-2-2020 INTERGROUP MEETING:**

- 4) Another option might be **SimulRing** - This service is offered by our current phone company (Vonage) at no additional charge. Choosing this feature directs an incoming call to ring the Vonage phone number (Intergroup#) **and** up to 5 other phone numbers at the same time. In other words, we choose (up to) 5 people/phone #s to be **'on alert'** and if/when a call comes in, all 5 phones will ring, whoever is available would answer.

The logistics would need to be worked out, as there is a lot to consider, but this 4<sup>th</sup> option could potentially solve the problem of missed calls. I have a few questions and concerns after briefly testing it so I need to contact Vonage again, and I will provide an updated report at the December Intergroup meeting.

**As a reminder:** There is no motion on the table at this time. Exploring other options was brought up because although the service we provide is valuable and needed, times have changed, as we've all gone mobile, and those changes warrant a look at how we do things, especially since the caller, possibly a desperate drunk, is affected. We all agree that desperate drunk is why we have this service in the first place. That said, if a more practical and feasible option is out there, I think we should consider making changes. Also, as a side note, I feel the telephone chair position might be easier to fill if the responsibilities, especially on weekends, wasn't so demanding.