

Oprah Calling

F.W.S. Newsletter, April 2008

In January, Fellowship-Wide Services (F.W.S.) received a call from the Oprah Winfrey Show (OWS), asking us if we could put them in touch with female sex addicts who'd be willing to tell their story on television. In accordance with [12 Recommended Guidelines for Dealing with the Media](#), the Board of Trustees met in emergency session to discuss whether this was an appropriate public relations opportunity. There were two main issues. First, was this the right kind of exposure for S.L.A.A.? The 12 Guidelines tell us to avoid sensationalism and controversy, ensure anonymity of S.L.A.A. members, and say "no" to any kind of deadline that would require us to bypass our group-conscience process by rushing. We felt that the OWS opportunity fit within these guidelines.

The second issue was whether F.W.S. and S.L.A.A. as a whole were ready to handle the potentially large response to the show. The producers seemed willing to make our contact information available on the show and on the Oprah website, and we envisioned the possibility of receiving many thousands, or even tens of thousands of phone calls, emails, or visits to our website. Could we handle the response? Our answer was, "No, but we can take the steps necessary to be ready before the show airs." We brainstormed on what changes would need to be made to our website, our phone system, and our staffing arrangements, and decided it was all possible.

As a Board we wanted to say yes to the opportunity, but we also felt this was a potentially significant new step for S.L.A.A. so we decided to consult the F.W.S. Conference. We sent a message to the Conference Charter Committee, who in turn forwarded it to the Chairs of all the Conference Committees, who in turn passed it on to the members of their committees, and there was a fulsome and lively discussion via e-mail. The group conscience of the Conference members who participated in that discussion was in agreement with the Board's group conscience. So we decided to accept the opportunity.

We put the word out through Conference delegates and Intergroup contacts, and wound up with around 20 women who were willing to be contacted by the show. We created an online discussion forum for these members so that we could provide them with ongoing information about the show and so that they could discuss the issues that arose for them in the process, particularly when it came to being interviewed in detail by an associate producer from the show. All of the members who made themselves available to be interviewed showed up with courage and enthusiasm and clarity and sobriety. There was a tremendous feeling of comradeship and support, and I believe that it is safe to say that the entire process was a growth experience for a lot of folks who participated.

But the Oprah folks decided to put the whole thing on the back burner because they realized it was a more complex issue than they'd foreseen, and they felt they needed more time to do the show. They told us they would try to revisit the issue sometime in May of this year. We don't know if they'll call in May or not. But we'll definitely put the word out to the entire Fellowship if and when OWS does a segment that includes S.L.A.A. members. This is precisely the kind of public information opportunity that could be very good for sex and love addicts everywhere. But with so little money, such a tiny office staff, and so few volunteers rolling up their sleeves, we will need to really pull together in carrying the message to the addicts who show up at our meetings, or on our phone and e-mail hotlines looking for recovery.