

Southern California World Service

District 64 Thought Force

Presented to the SCWS Assembly May 18, 2013

At the SCWS Committee meeting in August 1985 a motion was passed “To form a committee to make contact with Spanish groups.”

At the SCWS Committee meeting in February 1991 a motion was passed “To recommend Assembly consider the possibility of forming a Spanish District.”

Three months later, at the May 1991 SCWS Assembly the following motion was passed: “Add on a trial basis for three years, a new district (District 64) comprised of Group Representatives from Spanish-speaking meetings.”

About two years ago, a Board review of various past motions revealed that no past Board or Assembly had evaluated District 64, either at the end of the 3-year trial period or at any other time in the subsequent 20 years. The current Board recommended that a Thought Force be convened to look at District 64, 22 years after it was set up, to see how well it is serving the needs of the Spanish-speaking Groups which belong to District 64. According to the Service Manual (Page 64), a Thought Force is “a temporary unit of people established to research ideas and possibilities on a single defined task or activity. Sometimes they offer recommendations resulting from their findings.” They are “thinkers,” not “doers.” According to the Service Manual, the District 64 Thought Force is not a decision-making body; we can only make recommendations to our originating body—SCWS.

About 12 people worked on our District 64 Thought Force, half of us Spanish speakers who attend primarily Spanish-language Groups. All conversations, discussion and analyses were conducted using the Principles of Knowledge-Based Decision-Making. This focus allowed us to look at the role of District 64 in the California South Area not as judges but rather with an eye to how we can support the growth of Al-Anon as a whole.

A slide presentation accompanies this report which goes into our thoughts about District 64 in more detail.

A quick note: We have to talk about Groups when we discuss District 64 and Spanish-speaking Al-Anon members. Many Spanish-speaking Groups have several meetings a week. However, they are only one Group registered with the World Service Office. Generally the same people attend these various meetings. However, if we talk about Spanish-speaking meetings, it can artificially inflate the percentage of “meetings” that are Spanish-speaking. Interestingly, there are virtually no English-speaking Groups which have more than one meeting a week.

Here are some of the key facts that struck some of us.

Although District 64 was created for Spanish-speaking Groups in Southern California, today half of all Spanish-speaking Groups belong to the geographic districts in which they are located. Only one of these districts, District 48, has a majority of Spanish-speaking meetings. There are approximately 120 Spanish-speaking Groups in District 64, which covers all of California South and about the same number of groups who belong to other districts.

After many conversations during conference calls and in face-to-face meetings, we agree that there are basically three ways to serve California South's almost 250 Spanish-speaking Groups:

1. We can keep District 64 as it is.
2. We can create Hispanic Districts in addition to District 64 that are a manageable size.
3. We can unite all Spanish-speaking Groups into their geographic district.

Our slides go into more detail on the pros and cons of each possibility. Here's a quick summary of each option.

1. The argument for keeping District 64 as it is acknowledges that the district has worked hard to serve its more than 120 Groups. Members of these groups feel a strong loyalty to District 64 and appreciate the traditions it has developed over the past 22 years. District 64 provides information to its Groups in their native language—Spanish. Group members are proud of the unique part District 64 has played in SCWS's recent history.

The biggest challenge with District 64 is that it covers such a large geographical area that it does not meet the definition of a district as defined in the Service Manual: "Districts are a number of groups within a geographical part of a city, state." It is virtually impossible for the District 64 District Representative to get to all 120+ meetings spread out over huge distances. In addition, District 64 has more than twice as many Groups as our largest districts. Since all these groups have only one District Representative, the Spanish-speaking Groups in District 64 are under-represented at the Assembly. A final negative is the fact that District 64 isolates its Spanish-speaking Groups from contact with English-speaking Al-Anon Groups.

2. The District 64 Thought Force talked to Area delegates in several other states which have large Spanish-speaking populations to see how they organize their Spanish-speaking Groups. New Mexico, for example, has overlay Spanish-speaking districts in El Paso and Albuquerque that cover the same districts which include English-speaking meetings. Our second option would be to create additional Spanish-speaking Districts alongside District 64. Thought Force members disagreed on how many Districts this might be—from as few as two Districts, which would cut District 64 in half and create a second Spanish-speaking District—to "a few, some or several additional Districts."

The positive aspect of creating additional Spanish-speaking districts is that they would adhere more closely to the definition of a District. The Groups would be closer together, there would be fewer meetings to visit, and there would be more Spanish-speaking District Representatives at the Assembly so the Spanish-speaking Groups would be better represented.

Those who oppose the idea of more, but smaller Spanish-speaking Districts pointed out that it would be disruptive to shrink District 64 into a smaller District and set up new ones. Some Thought Force members worried that there might not be enough Spanish-speaking Al-Anon members willing to become DRs. But the biggest objection was the same one that some members had about District 64—that Spanish-speaking Districts isolate Spanish-speaking Groups, creating barriers and separating our English-speaking and Spanish-speaking members.

3. The third option is Unification. In this scenario all Spanish-speaking Groups would join the District in which they are located geographically. We would no longer have in District 64 a district that is the same size as our Area. The benefit to this approach is that it blends the strengths of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Groups. We know it would work because half of our Spanish-speaking Groups already belong to their geographic District. With this option suddenly Southern California World Service becomes the Al-Anon Fellowship—not English-speaking Al-Anon and Spanish-speaking Al-Anon. We learn from each other and grow with one another.

This option represents a change and for many of us change is difficult. There would be some temporary disruptions during the transition from District 64 to a unified Area with English and Spanish-speaking meetings working together in the same Districts. Some of us worried that we might actually lose some Spanish-speaking Al-Anon members who could not accept this change.

Conclusion

It would clearly require a Task Force to continue exploring these options and to bring to the SCWS Assembly some recommendations based on Knowledge-Based Decision-Making among all our membership—both Spanish- and English-speaking.

The purpose of the District 64 Thought Force was to begin the process of looking at District 64 to see if it is still fulfilling the purpose for which it was established 22 years ago. Our job is now done. We have started the conversation. We are eager to see the direction it takes.