



# eConnect

La Leche League US Western Division  
Forming Connections Leader to Leader  
Issue Number 8

## USWD Staff and Area Events

### Great New Offer from USWD!

In the not-so-distant past, Areas in the Western Division were required to invite United States Western Division Staff representatives to their Area Conferences. Areas may now decide if they wish to invite USWD Staff. This offers a considerable savings to the Area—funding USWD special guests is no longer necessary!

However, USWD Staff finds that important elements are missed by not visiting the Areas, attending Conferences and other events, e.g., getting to know Area Leaders, attaching faces to names, and building rapport between Area Leaders, Area Department Coordinators (ADCs) and USWD Staff. The value of face-to-face contact is important enough to USWD Staff that we're willing to co-fund USWD Staff attendance at Area events.

We'll pay transportation costs if the Area provides lodging, event meals and a complimentary event registration to the USWD Staff representative.

USWD Staff is eager to meet with Department Coordinators and their teams, discuss the USWD Agreements with Area Leaders, present sessions, assist event staff as needed (such as with registration, etc.) and even be available for late-night chats.

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We realize Areas are unique and not every Area puts on an Area Conference, so this offer is for 2008 and includes Area Leader Days and other Area Leader meetings.

Contact us at [uswdstaff@gmail.com](mailto:uswdstaff@gmail.com) to request a USWD Staff representative. Include the date(s), location, closest airport, a description of the event and how you'd like the USWD Staff member to be involved.

(See Chapter 6 of the USWD Events Handbook for more information on inviting USWD Staff to Area events. If you do not have a copy of the USWD Events Handbook, please contact Gail Gesley ([gmglesley@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gmglesley@sbcglobal.net)). Printed copies are available.) Please note that not every USWD Staff member is able to travel freely; we all have family and/or work obligations. While we will make every effort to provide your first choice, we cannot guarantee it.

We look forward to seeing you in person either in your Area or at the USWD TEAM meeting being planned for June 18-22, 2008.

(All Leaders are invited to TEAM08. An email announcement was sent in early February through the WesternUS Newsletter on the Community

Network and Areas will be distributing the invitation to all Leaders. For further information see "Joan Meyer: TEAM08 Coordinator" and watch <http://www.lllusa.org/USWD/EVENTS.>)

## Responsiveness & Responsibility

By Sue Scott, Division Communication Skills Instructor

Yesterday I got a helping call from a young breastfeeding mother. I don't know much about this mother. But I do know she gathered her courage to call someone she did not know and to *ask* for support. I offered her information and encouragement. When I thought we were done, she surprised me. She said, "I am still not sure I know what to do." Ahh, now I know something else about this woman. Out of all the options she had for dealing with what could be perceived as my own lack of support (e.g., calling friends to complain about LLL, writing a vitriolic blog, trying to find options on her own, giving up on breastfeeding, etc.) she chose to say, "I still don't know what to do." She trusted me to care. She understood that some of the burden of getting what she needed rests on her. She was responsive and responsible. Well, I guess I was, too. You can bet we kept talking until she did have a plan of action.

I am grateful to her for telling me that she needed more. I am grateful that we respected each other as adult peers. It got me to thinking about relationships and support.

I am part of various geographic and work-centered groups that give and receive support to others literally around the world. Periodically, I like to examine myself, see how I am doing, think about how my mental models serve or do not serve the people I work with and the structures I work within. Whenever I need to puzzle through something in LLL, I try to refer back to basics: Leaders give peer-to-peer support and information and encouragement to breastfeeding mothers. This describes a relationship and implies responsiveness. Relationships are complex, of necessity reciprocal, and involve communication.

As Leaders, we deal with all kinds of complex relationships. The most obvious is the primary relationship of mother and baby. Mother to baby and vice versa is not a peer relationship. Yes, it is reciprocal and responsive. But it is solely the responsibility of the mother to make sure things are going well with breastfeeding. Baby has no responsibility there.

We also deal with relationships beyond that: Leader and mother, Leader and Leader Applicant, Leader and co-Leader, Leader and support Leader. In these relationships, who has the responsibility to make sure things are going well?

This might seem obvious but I believe it is a very important question. How we answer it might determine the quality of relationships in LLL. What we believe down deep could influence behavior and work and impact that of others.

Some possible beliefs around relationships in LLL could include the following. Please note that I said these are *possible* beliefs. People are complex. Individuals have moods and changing beliefs. They pay attention to different things at different times. Keeping these beliefs in mind can help us to think through some times when we might disagree with others. They also help us think through ways to help each other do what is essential to LLL: help mothers and babies.

Belief: We are a mothers' organization; therefore we mother other Leaders. Leaders are responsible to make sure other Leaders get what they need. We make sure they are OK. What kind of behavior comes from this thinking?

Belief: We are a mothering organization, therefore we can expect to receive mothering for ourselves. We can expect to be taken care of by other Leaders. What kind of behavior comes from this thinking?

Belief: Since we sometimes deal with matters of life and death in LLL, we need the organization to be x, y or z because otherwise babies might die. What kind of behavior comes from this thinking?

Belief: We relate peer-to-peer as adults and share responsibility to get our needs met in this organization. What kind of behavior comes from this thinking?

Perhaps we need to be more mindful about possible beliefs behind why we do what we do. Perhaps this mindfulness could help us reach more understanding of each other and in turn our organization. Perhaps it would help us give and seek support.

How are you doing as you work within the structures in LLL? If you are not sure what to do or need to dialogue about a situation in your Area, USWD support staff is available. Please share responsibility by asking for what you need.

## **Introducing Joan Meyer, TEAM08 Coordinator**

We're pleased to introduce Joan Meyer as the TEAM08 Coordinator. TEAM08 is a United States Western Division (USWD) continuing education event for Leaders to be held on July 18-22, 2008 in Phoenix, AZ. (TEAM stands for Together Everyone Achieves More.)

Joan is a Leader in Tucson, Arizona. She's the mother of four grown sons (three married, one single) and eight grandchildren (four boys, four girls). Joan brings a wealth of event planning experience to this job. She's been ACE (Area Coordinator of Events) five different times over the years starting when the job was called "state meeting coordinator" and Arizona and New Mexico were one Area. Her most recent stint was ACE for Arizona 2003-2005 and now she continues as an active member of the Arizona event team. Joan served on USWD Staff in the early 1990's as Area Conference Administrator for three years. As part of this job, she planned the first TEAM in Phoenix, an event that is still very fondly remembered by many Leaders.

Joan has worked for 15 years as the kitchen coordinator for a charter school with over 850 students from pre-school to 8th grade. She said she walked into the interview after 29 years as a stay-

at-home mother with only her LLL experience on her resume. She was hired two hours later and credits La Leche League for her success. Joan also coordinates a singles group at her church, and enjoys reading and hiking in her free time. However, she is quick to point out that La Leche League is her first love. Joan was accredited in 1964 by Mary Ann Kerwin (how cool is that!).

You may send a welcome to Joan and ideas for TEAM08 to:

Joan Meyer  
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Tucson, Arizona 85748  
520.751.7663  
Cjmeyer40@aol.com

If you'd like to join the TEAM08 committee, please email Joan or  
TEAM08-moderator@community.lli.org

While TEAM has been held every other summer for many years, this is the first time USWD is working distributively to plan the event. The TEAM08 planning committee is open to all interested Leaders and is a mixture of some Staff members, some Leaders with Area event planning experience and Leaders who believe in the value of face-to-face meetings. We are grateful that Joan, as TEAM08 Coordinator, is willing to take a precedent-setting job and to be involved in a new way of working.

We look forward to seeing you this summer at TEAM08!

## **FAQ: Consensus**

**What is consensus?**  
**What's the difference between Consensus and Majority Rule?**

Some dictionaries say it is "*general agreement or concord; harmony,*" "*an opinion or position reached by a group as a whole,*" "*agreement in the judgment or opinion reached by a group as a whole.*"

Consensus is sometimes confused with a large majority of opinion, a majority much greater than 50%, such as 75%, 80% or even 90%. In a way that is true, but it is also more than that.

The real difference between consensus and majority is in how the decision is reached. With a majority rule process, a group of people makes a proposal and presents it to the larger group. There may be more or less discussion, then the proposal is voted on, and if a certain majority vote “yes,” the proposal passes. That required majority can be anything from 50% up. Significantly greater than 50% is sometimes referred to as a “super-majority.”

Consensus can look pretty similar. A group of people makes a proposal. Discussion happens; a decision is made. But in a consensus process, the objective is more about discovering the wisdom of the group than it is about making a quick decision. The whole group participates early on in the process. Everyone has a part in the discussion of the situation, the formulation of the proposal and its final implementation. Not everyone will participate to the same degree or in the same way, but everyone participates significantly, more than just a yes or no to the final formulation of the proposal. Everyone’s contribution to the decision is genuinely valued and respected, even when it differs from the majority opinion of the members of the group. And because of that participation and respect, everyone “owns” the decision and takes responsibility for it.

For example, the ten Leaders of the North County chapter want to do a fundraiser and meet to decide what to do. Proposals are made and the pros and cons are discussed. Most people support Plan A, but two Leaders feel strongly that Plan B is a better use of the Group’s money. A vote is taken. Plan A wins with an 80% majority, the number their rules require. Unfortunately, two Leaders leave, feeling that their concerns haven’t really been addressed, because Plan A had majority support. The result is a plan supported by eight Leaders, with two more who don’t agree and will find it difficult if not impossible to help.

The ten Leaders in the South County Chapter also want to raise funds and they too meet to come up

with a plan. They are committed to finding a consensus as they make the decision. They begin by looking at as many possibilities as they can, talking about how each relates to their purpose as a group and to what is important to them. As they discuss all the possibilities, they find that most of them support a similar plan, Plan A. However, two Leaders feel strongly that Plan B is a better use of their resources. At that point, the group decides to slow down a bit. They realize that if two people have such strong feelings, these two Leaders may have more information that’s important for everyone to hear. They take the time to listen carefully to the concerns of these two, not with a view to convince them, but rather to understand, look for common ground, see if there is an alternative that will work for everyone. Perhaps there is something that the group hasn’t fully considered? All ten Leaders embark on an exploration to find common ground. They set aside their desire to make a decision and be done, and instead focus on understanding each others’ concerns, the underlying needs that are important to each Leader. Eventually, they are able to come up with a plan that takes all their concerns into account. All ten Leaders agree to proceed with that plan. They have come to consensus that this is the plan they all want to implement. All ten Leaders are excited about the plan, and eagerly look forward to working together and doing what they can to help.

Consensus can take more time, but it respects the concerns of everyone involved and leaves no one feeling unheard. It also puts the responsibility for making decisions on everyone in the group, not just a few.

Consensus often saves time in the long run, however. The kind of in-depth exploration required to come to consensus often surfaces problems that would otherwise cause trouble later on. It allows the group to deal with these concerns sooner in the planning process. When everyone involved gives willing support to a decision they’ve participated in, there is less second-guessing, more cooperative spirit in the implementation.

## **What about reaching consensus in a larger group, say an Area of a hundred Leaders or more?**

Reaching consensus with large groups doesn't necessarily mean that everyone must contribute equally to the conversation. It does, however, mean that everyone is included, that is, everyone has the opportunity to participate to the extent she desires.

For example, an Area decides that their bylaws need changing. The conversation would be open to all Leaders in the Area from the very beginning, since all Leaders in the Area are both relevant to and affected by the decision.

Now, not all Leaders will be interested in working directly on writing bylaws changes, but some will. Others may be interested in taking part in the discussion of what should or should not be changed and what the new bylaws will cover. However, they don't actually want to write them. Some will just want the overview so they can give input if something comes up that they feel strongly about. And some will say they really don't care, and whatever others come up with is fine.

All of those folks participate to their desired level in the decision. Their contribution and concerns are listened to and respected.

## **Of Water Pipes & Computers**

Deirdre Knowles, USWD Pubs/Online

In recent months, Leaders have been frustrated by errors and breakdowns in the computer systems at LLLI. A new system is under development, but it sometimes seems that things are getting worse instead of better. It reminds me of the situation at my house in recent months.

For thirty years I lived in a house that had low water pressure. The water company was required to supply 15 pounds of pressure, and did so most of the time, but just barely! (Most homes have water pressure between 50 and 80 pounds.) I had to clean faucet aerators frequently just to keep water flowing, not because they got clogged with

any real debris, but because tiny particles that would normally pass through the screens would stick—not enough water pressure to push them through. Sometimes water would quit altogether for several seconds and I'd be left standing in the shower wondering if this would be the time it didn't start back up! My laundry washer took 15-20 minutes to fill on a good day. I had to be careful when buying a new appliance—washer or dishwasher—that it didn't have a time-fill water shut-off, or it would time-out before it filled! But I compensated and made it work...usually.

Well, finally the water department decided to replace their aging system! But...for the last several months we've endured work crews tearing up the road, piles of pipes sitting around, and even more disruptions to the water supply. Then a couple of weeks ago they switched to the new system. Immediately two of my toilets started running continuously and had to be readjusted! Some neighbors had joints burst or faucets leak due to the increased pressure. (They did warn us ... and we were lucky; our 30-year-old pipes seem to be holding.) And now we have water that flows continuously, a washer that fills in record time, and a dishwasher that runs faster—it's wonderful! But the changeover was a pain in the neck!

This is what's happening at LLLI. The system was long past needing replacement. LLLI was maintaining the database on outdated software held together with the computer equivalent of bailing wire and duct tape! Because the new database is designed to allow Areas to feed their information directly to LLLI, the new system will enable LLLI to be much more responsive and accurate. The mounting difficulties in recent months have been due to the challenges of getting changed over to the new system. The process of doing the work seems even more disruptive than the old dysfunctional system. Still, when it's fully operational, it will be better than we've ever had. When they were tearing up the roads by my house, we could see what was happening and know that the disruption was related to the repairs. We don't have that luxury with LLLI because we can't see what is happening behind the scenes. But soon we will (we are now beginning to) see the increased efficiency and responsiveness coming from the new system—I am excited to watch it happen!

Note: A few days after I wrote this, I had yet another example as I was taking my son and daughter-in-law to the airport. They are doing construction, redoing freeway and putting in light rail around the airport. Same thing: it didn't work well before; now it's really bad, but after the construction is done, it'll be much better. Lots of road construction in the Seattle area right now so that sort of example is before us a lot lately!

## **Orientation & Support for Area Department Workers**

Peggy Wiedmeyer, USWD Publications/Online

Over the last few years, USWD staff has tried to give Area Leaders, especially those involved in Area-level work such as Area Council members and other administrators more freedom, flexibility, choices and decision-making authority. Unfortunately that meant we didn't always provide the concrete examples or "hands-on" support that some people wanted. In an effort to be less controlling, we erred by sometimes not giving enough direction. Consequently, since spring 2007 we've recommitted to orienting and supporting Leaders doing these tasks in a responsive and customized way.

### **Area Event Planners**

Staff support for Area event planners is currently provided by Gail Gesley (backed up by Sue Garcia, So. CA/NV ACS) and Patricia DuBray. The USWD Events Handbook, a guidebook for Area Coordinators of Events (ACEs) and other LLL event planners, is being updated. What's new about this project is that the work is open to participation by all Leaders who are interested in working on it. The three main writers so far have been one USWD Staff member, a former ACE (Patty Jacobs), and an Area events team member (Fran Dereszynski), with lots of input from the current ACEs. Every Western Division ACE received a draft of this updated handbook at the 2007 LLLI Conference.

### **Area Leader Departments**

Staff support for Area Leader Departments is currently provided by Wista Waldroop, with back-up help provided by Peggy Wiedmeyer. Mentors

have been added to the Leader Department to provide more support. This department also has a step-by-step orientation that is directed by each new Area Coordinator of Leaders (ACL), according to her needs and work style. The DA Notebook has been updated, and all ACLs have received information about working with agreements as well as one-on-one help from Wista and the two mentors.

### **Area Communications Coordinator (ACC) Area Leaders' Letter Editor (ALLE)**

Staff support for ACCs and ALLEs is currently provided by Peggy Wiedmeyer and Deirdre Knowles. New ACCs and ALLEs receive personal contact via email and/or phone calls. They are encouraged to tell their support person what kind of support they want and need, based on their previous publications experience. The Publications Department now sends paper memos via surface mail every two-three months. The USWD Publications Notebook, which has been available online since July 2006, has been printed and mailed to any ACC or ALLE who wanted one but didn't want to have to print it herself. All ACCs and ALLEs who were not able to attend the GSPS and/or LLLI Conference received handouts that were shared in Chicago.

### **Area Professional Liaison Department**

Staff support for Professional Liaison Leaders is currently provided by Kelley Baer, with back-up help provided by Becky Hugh. The Professional Liaison Department has provided all of the PL Leaders with new PL Notebooks. Each new PL Leader who is appointed receives a personal phone call to go over things like the Health Advisory Council and the Legal Advisory Council, and how to access them. They also cover general PL issues, and are told that the USWD PLD is available whenever they are needed. Follow-up calls are made as needed, as are contacts by email. If a new PL Leader does not have a former PL Leader from her Area, who can orient her to the job and to Area Council work in her Area, then the staff PLD gives more individual one-on-one attention and help.

### **Communication Skills Instructor (CSI)**

USWD Staff support for CSIs and Communication Skills Facilitators (CSFs) is currently provided by Sue Scott, Rosetta Bartels and Misty Dunn, with

additional support provided by Deirdre Knowles. Prospective CSIs communicate with one or more of the Communication Skills Instructor-Trainers (CSITs) Sue, Rosetta, or Misty for orientation and training. Customized orientation includes personal planning for the prospective CSIs' learning experience, a comprehensive CSI Toolbox and face-to-face training to practice the skills and facilitation of sessions, personal letters giving feedback to sessions the new CSI has led, plus phone-coaching, if desired, to prepare for sessions. The USWD CS Workgroup is always available for feedback and assistance with any CS-related projects or questions; resources are provided in our online files, and CN discussion groups. In addition, the CS Workgroup offers to coach CSIs, Leaders and/or Area Council Team members with difficult conversations.

### **Finance**

Staff support for Area Finance Coordinators and Treasurers (AFCs/ATs) is currently provided by Becky Hugh, with additional support provided by

Bill Dunn. Also coming on board as a mentor is Susan Geil, former AFC of Illinois. Finance folks received new notebooks including a new orientation checklist. The notebook is designed to be a living document with changes and additions being incorporated at the suggestions of those doing the work. This notebook will soon be housed on the USWD Website in the finance pages. Special additional handouts were created to help disseminate information about the new tiered membership program and organizational data system at LLLI.

### **Coordinator of Leader Accreditation (CLA)**

Staff support for CLAs is currently provided by Lori Bryan and Sherryl Dombeck.

This is an overview of how USWD staff works to support Areas; it's not meant to be limiting. In addition, members of staff want to be available for help or consultation however we are needed.

