

## UNITY, SERVICE AND RECOVERY



The aim of PI is to improve communications with professionals and the public sector and show how we can cooperate with your organisations in providing a free service to help with the growing problem of alcoholism.

For seventy five years AA has helped thousands of seemingly hopeless cases to recover from alcoholism through total abstinence: these men and women became sober, responsible members of society through attending AA meetings, practising our 12-step programme of recovery and helping others to recover from alcoholism.

There are Alcoholics Anonymous meetings every day and night of the week in all areas throughout the UK and information about these can be obtained from our local PI officers or one of our three offices based in York, London or Glasgow.

Professionals who regularly make use of AA often do so by getting to know local PI officers personally and then possibly by attending open meetings.

In addition PI teams will make formal presentations at seminars and conferences and give in-house training sessions or staff talks on a regular basis.

Local teams are available to attend exhibitions and displays and we can organise public meetings or attendance at AA open meetings where you can experience the form and dynamics of AA. PI is the public relations work of Alcoholics Anonymous and aims to promote

goodwill and provide a network of services for all professional organisations and the media.

In all public relations, AA's sole objective is to help the still suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by freely making available to you, experience of what we are, what we can do and what we cannot do.

The following service functions have been created to assist professionals and the community.

Healthcare: working with hospital and treatment centre staff including individual contact with patients.

Employment: dialogue with management and human resource teams in the understanding of alcoholism and contact with employees who have a drink problem.

Armed Services: members who are experienced in the armed services provide talks about the programme of recovery and the availability of worldwide meetings.

Prisons: prison visits and the holding of AA meetings for inmates.

Probation/Social Services: providing a facility to introduce people on probation to AA meetings.

If you wish to express an interest in what we have to offer or you would like more information, these are our lines of contact.

Telephone the General Service Office on 01904 644026  
The Southern Service Office on 020 7407 0700  
The Northern Service Office on 0141 226 2214

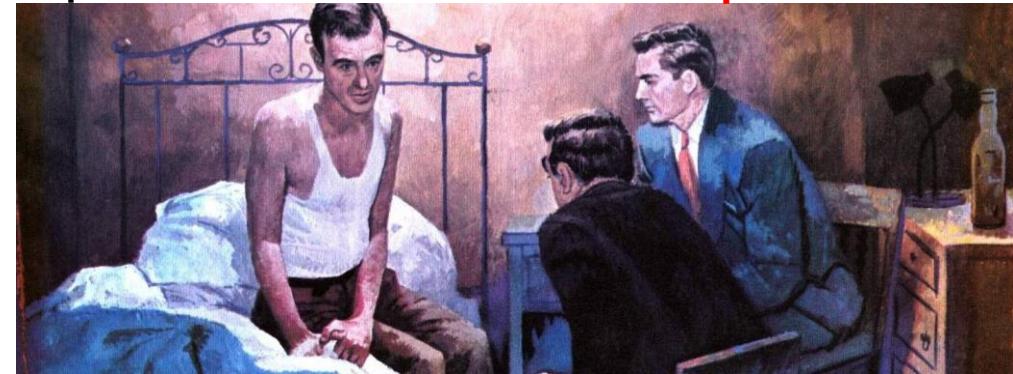
God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.

## SOUTHERN SERVICE OFFICE BULLETIN



Our primary purpose is to stay sober, and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety

### Sept 2018 House of Commons Reception Issue 9



"To reach more alcoholics, understanding of AA and public goodwill towards AA must go on growing everywhere. We need to be on still better terms with medicine, religion, employers, government, courts, prisons, mental hospitals and all enterprises in the alcoholic field. We need the ever-increasing goodwill of editors, writers, television and radio channels. These publicity outlets need to be opened ever wider."

Bill W (Our co-founder) 1951

This event exists to provide information to Members of Parliament, Peers and individuals drawn from what we term the "professional community"; the health and welfare services; the Police, Prison and probation services, spiritual and civic groups, employers and Armed Services; in short, any organisation that may need to refer the still-suffering alcoholic to an AA meeting or have an understanding of the disease of alcoholism. This year the reception will be kindly hosted by the Rt. Hon Liam Byrne MP



## UNITY, SERVICE AND RECOVERY

In 2005 a reception was hosted by AA at the House of Commons on 17<sup>th</sup> March from 5-7pm, the first of its kind and as we know, not the last. The meeting room was sponsored jointly by Tony Coleman, Labour MP for Putney (as a result of a contact made through Jonathan G., SWIG's former Probation Liaison Rep, following the Criminal Justice Symposium organized by SWIG in 2004), and Simon Hughes, Liberal MP for North Southwark and Bermondsey. Although this was initially an Intergroup contact, it was quickly decided that an event of this kind should be organized nationally, which meant it would be funded through the PI budget.

An organizing committee set the whole event up, with the brief of raising awareness about AA and its programme of recovery to MPs, Peers, the Department of Health, the Home Office (prisons/probation), and professionals within the field of addiction, both private and state funded. The event was chaired by Pravin K., General Service Board member for London Region North and started at 5pm. There was a selection of speakers from both AA and the professionals. First off was Tim S., PI Trustee, who gave a brief outline of what AA does and doesn't do. He was followed by two mini-chairs by Victoria and John H., giving their experience, strength and hope. They were followed by three speakers from the professional community:

**. Deborah Brooke**, a psychiatrist with 20 years experience in addiction in the NHS

**John Mealyer**, a treatment project manager with RAPT

**Sue Baker** who was appointed Non-Alcoholic Trustee, who has 20 years experience in the alcoholism field, having been Asst. Director of Alcohol Concern.

There was then opportunity for feedback and questions from the audience. One peer spoke about his involvement with AA from a political and personal point of view. Most feedback stressed the positive value of AA, though all talked of the necessity for AA to raise its profile, not least by stressing it is self-supporting and self-referring

a useful tool in this present climate of cutbacks and targets.

Simon Hughes, one of the sponsoring MPs, spoke from the floor. He was very keen to work with AA, but stressed the importance of raising awareness amongst MPs and policy makers, particularly at a local level.

To this end, the Committee is keen to follow up MPs and professionals who did (or didn't) attend the event. Simon Hughes proposed that this reception should be held as an annual event. Unfortunately, Tony Colman lost his seat in the Election. A further organizing Committee has been convened and, remembering that AA may be anonymous but we are not invisible, wheels have been set in motion to organize the following years event, in February or March 2006. Although there was good attendance from professionals and AAs alike and there was valuable swapping of information and experience, there was a poor turnout from MPs and Peers. However, valuable lessons have been learned from organizing this event, both beforehand and on the day itself.

Having been informed that MPs only come to an event such as this if food and wine are provided, a buffet was organized afterwards, beautifully served by the House of Commons staff. Although no wine was drunk at all, there was too big a rush for the food from AA members and they should be asked to hold back in the future.

Special thanks for Jonathan G for setting the whole thing off. It just goes to show how one contact can lead to greater things.

### How to Make AA Work for You

Most people have heard of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and are aware that it is there to help alcoholics to recover and regain a healthier lifestyle. However, how this is achieved is shrouded in mystery as far as the general public is concerned and that is partly because of the principle of maintaining individual anonymity in AA. As a result, there are all sorts of preconceived ideas about it and this can result in making sufferers and professionals wary about engaging with AA.

I first attended an AA meeting in my capacity as a newly appointed Consultant Psychiatrist working in addiction in Birmingham over 30 years ago. The thing that struck me most was that here, in the AA meeting, was a room full of people who looked healthy and were sober. I could not help but compare them to the people who were coming to see me in my outpatient clinic who appeared to be depressed, defeated and physically unhealthy. I have subsequently concentrated on trying to persuade patients to engage with AA. Once they have engaged with AA they usually find that their initial misconceptions are unfounded.

People often ask about the evidence that AA works. There are two types of evidence. Firstly, there is the evidence that results from comparative studies where one treatment intervention is compared to another proven intervention. There is an increasing body of evidence that demonstrates that AA assists individuals to achieve sobriety and promote a more enduring change. Secondly there is also the evidence from very simple observation where by attending AA meetings one can see and hear of the recovery pathway of lots of individuals. Double blind control trials are not the only way to observe that something is of benefit. There has never been a double blind control trial testing the efficacy of having a parachute when jumping out of a plane compared to not wearing one. The benefit of having a parachute is easily observed and glaringly obvious. AA is a self help organisation whose principles and philosophy have evolved over the last 77 years. It is based on the collective knowledge of sufferers who have achieved sobriety through sharing their experiences as to how to achieve recovery. It has undoubtedly assisted millions of people to achieve sobriety. This common experience and the evolution of a common but broad based strategy has been shared and found to be helpful by the still suffering alcoholic.

The first step is to contact AA and attend an AA meeting which you can do by phone. A member from AA will be willing to meet with you initially, and share their experiences of the illness and how they have managed to get into recovery. Contacting AA can be daunting and someone from AA will be willing to assist you in attending your first meeting. By listening to what is being said in the meeting you will find that it helps to dispel the various myths and prejudices about AA.

You do not have to speak (known as sharing) at your first meeting. You will see that people are healthy, friendly and willing to help you. This assists you in gaining an understanding of the condition that they have developed. You will notice that suddenly you do not feel alone. The sharing of information and feeling that you are not alone is a very powerful mechanism to start the change. If other people can do it then so can I....If you attend you will hear members talk of the 12 Steps which can be seen as the basic principles in helping you to achieve the change. Simply put, the first step is to realise and accept that one is an alcoholic and that that pattern of behaviour has had a destructive effect on one's life. The second and third step is all about how to go about effecting a positive change. The fourth step is about developing the ability to self reflect and thereby gain a better understanding of what makes you tick. This will help you in making other changes in the way that you deal with life. The last step is about helping other still suffering alcoholics. AA is not a religious organisation. There are people from all walks of life and every persuasion just as there are in the general public. There are people who are atheists, agnostics and others who belong to other formalised religions. It does not matter what your beliefs are, nor will anyone try and persuade you to change your beliefs. People do talk about a spiritual awakening in the last step but this is not a religious experience but more of a growing awareness of the complexity of one's existence.

AA is totally self supporting. It does not rely on government funding which would make it vulnerable to changes in government funding policies. To paraphrase a colleague, Professor Jonathan Chick, AA is of infinite value as a resource to the NHS, the law and society generally, since it does not cost society one penny, yet the benefits of helping sufferers of this illness to recover from their addiction is of enormous value to society.

So if you know of someone whose drinking is causing difficulties in their lives, the first step is to try AA. However, do not expect a quick fix i.e. one meeting won't be enough and you may have to attend three or four times a week initially

The important message is that you can recover from this illness and regain control over your life. The solution is simple. The first step is to pick up the phone and speak to someone from Alcoholics Anonymous.

Dr Ash Kahn  
Consultant Psychiatrist  
Non-Alcoholic Trustee, General Service Board of Alcoholics  
Anonymous Great Britain

