**RAF Cranwell presentation notes**

**Slide 1 – Cover page**

Good afternoon to you all. Many thanks for inviting me here to give you some information about Alcoholics Anonymous.

My name’s Mike and I’m a recovering alcoholic and my last alcoholic drink was on 7th April 2010.

In accordance with our traditions, I would request that you respect my anonymity – “Anonymity is the spirit of our foundation”.

I am the Midlands Region armed services liaison officer for AA, and also a member of the armed services sub-committee that reports directly to the board of trustees.

Could you also please note that any opinions expressed are my personal view only – and not the official view of AA

**Slide 2 – A bit about me**

Before I go into the main presentation, I would like to tell you a little bit about my journey. I will keep it fairly short, and to the point, because I would need several hours to share my whole story.

I took my first drink at the age of 15. I was bullied at school and some of the 6th formers invited me to a lunchtime session with them. I was delighted to have been asked but hated the taste of the bitter and lime. However, for a sort of self preservation, I kept going as it was a way of “fitting in”

Fast forward a few years and I joined the RAF as an LMech(GC). This was a rebellion from me. My father had been an officer in the Royal Artillery and he wanted me to join the army – I decided to join a league of gentlemen instead.

Alcohol played a big part in my service career – it was a bit different in the late 60’s/early 70’s. And, yes, I got into a few scrapes due to it – I can see that looking back. It even involved a 2 week period of incarceration in a military detention centre.

I left the RAF in 1975, having served 6 years.

Fast forward again, following a messy divorce I met the love of my life. We had a lovely daughter together and we really were a happy family. I had become a successful project manager and principal engineer in the railway industry – working for an international consultancy. This involved a lot of travel, and a lot of lonely nights in hotel rooms. So where did I go – gthe bar on expenses.

At this stage, even though I was a heavy drinker, I could stop for weeks, or even months, at a time. Then disaster struck. In 2000, my partner collapsed one evening and, later in hospital, I was asked to allow them to switch off her life support as she was brain dead. I gave permission and was left with an 11 year old daughter.

A few days later I saw, on the news, that someone had just come out of a coma after 10 years. That was it, my mind said that I had killed my partner. That made me cross the line – I drank out of guilt and to numb my emotions. Fortunately, due to travelling a lot, I was able to hide it from my employers. That was until such time as I found myself on my knees in a hotel room, 6000 miles away from home, thinking “I can’t do this anymore”.

I came home and self-referred myself into rehab, who introduced me to AA as part of their treatment.

That was over 8 years ago, and I haven’t drunk alcohol since.

There is a lot more to my story, but AA has saved my life – and that of my soon to become 30 year old daughter.

**Slide 3**

Alcoholism is recognised as disease by the World Health Organisation. It features in their top 20 list of diseases.

The concept of it being a disease was very new in 1935 (when AA was formed), but has helped countless alcoholics come to terms with their condition.

**Slide 4**

Strangely enough, unlike other illnesses, the person affected tends to deny their condition – a state of denial – until such time as they diagnose themselves.

**Slide 5 – Title page (some facts and figures)**

Before I tell you a bit about AA, I think that it is worth recognising some facts and figures – all of which come from well founded research by outside agencies. On a personal level it does ME good to be reminded of these as it helps me to remember what I don’t want to go back to.

**Slide 6 – Facts and figures**

It is worth noting that a heavy drinker is not necessarily an alcoholic. There is a very fine line that has to be crossed. A heavy drinker can stop – an alcoholic cannot! For an alcoholic one drink is too many and 20 are not enough.

Personally I cost the NHS a lot of money prior to gaining sobriety – in and out of A & E with heart issues, TIA etc. Yes I have AF but that has only been successfully diagnosed, and treated, because I have stopped drinking.

**Slide 7 – Who does it affect**

At a personal level within AA, I willingly mix with a whole range of people – from the street sleeper to millionaires, and all occupations that you can imagine.

**Slide 8 – Who does it affect (continued)**

These statistics show the devastating affect that alcoholism can have on families

**Slide 9 – Who does it affect (continued)**

Read the slide

**Slide 10 – Title page (So what is Alcoholics anonymous)**

Now for a bit about AA itself

**Slide 11 – Alcoholics Anonymous IS**

Our unity on this is part of our traditions and encompasses tradition one …….

**Slide 12 – Alcoholics Anonymous IS NOT**

It is important that we remain independent. Past history has proven that any form of affiliation can destroy such a self help organisation. We do, however, cooperate with outside agencies – there is a big difference

**Slide 13 - Alcoholics Anonymous IS NOT (continued)**

Some people think that we are some form of sect, or religious organisation. That is far from the truth. AA is represented throughout the world so we can’t be religious – which religion should we choose.

We have what is known as a spiritual, or self awareness, programme

**Slide 14 – The only requirement is a desire to stop drinking**

DESIRE is the key word. You have to do it for yourself – not for your children or family etc. If not for yourself then it doesn’t work

**Slide 15 – We are self supporting**

We do not accept outside financial help and neither lend our name to, or endorse, outside interests. We are not a business, do not endorse anything, and are not allied to any medical, political or religious institutions

**Slide 16 - AA**

The same programme founded by Bill W and Dr Bob is used today – and successfully. Many have tried to change it but without success

**Slide 17 – Bill W and Dr Bob**

Our founders. Bill W was on a business trip to Akron, Ohio, and had the thought of a drink but did not want to. Instead he rang around until he was put in touch with another hopeless alcoholic. They met and talked and found that talking to each other about drink relieved them of their desire to drink – the rest, as they say, is history

**Slide 18 – How AA works**

Our primary purpose is to stay sober, to help other alcoholics achieve sobriety and to carry the message to the still sick and suffering alcoholic. Many have similar experiences and can help other alcoholics by sharing how they dealt with an issue - I heard my own story at a meeting in Dublin! Sympathy is a great enabler – a good excuse for a drink

The 12 step programme requires total honesty and you are supported by a sponsor (mentor) who has worked the programme. It allows you to face your demons and work on correcting your faults. Only another alcoholic can understand your excuses. Step one helps us define ourselves as alcoholics “we admitted that we were powerless over alcohol”.

 **Slide 19 – How AA works (continued)**

The simple version of the steps

**Slide 20 - How AA works (continued)**

We spread a message of hope and can assist in all forms of alcohol awareness events, such as todays forum

**Slide 21 – We give back freely**

This helps us to maintain our sobriety and, yes, we do it for nothing. But we recovering alcoholics are REAL experts on alcoholism. We speak from experience, not theory.

**Slide 22 – How people come to AA**

I was fortunate in that I obtained a place in a treatment centre, paid for by Notts PCT before such funding was stopped. I desperately wanted to stop drinking but needed the treatment centre environment to help me. This also helped me to start addressing my demons. It has been shown that there is almost always an underlying cause for the addiction that the alcoholic needs to address. The support in such an environment helps kick start the process but AA follows the process through. The treatment centre helps give physical sobriety but the 12 step programme gives emotional sobriety.

**Slide 23 – Title page (AA and the armed forces)**

Now for some specifics

**Slide 24 - AA and the armed forces**

This list shows just some of the ways in which AA can help you, and/or others.

Normally someone, who thinks that they have a problem with alcohol, would ring the AA helpline and a 12th stepper (someone in good recovery) will ring them back and, possibly, take them to their first meeting. Self referral being a condition.

However, for the armed forces only, it is allowed for one of your welfare team/chaplaincy/medical professional etc. to call the helpline and ask for somebody to come and talk to someone. The reason for this being your natural security arrangements.

If deemed necessary, you, or the individual, can request that the 12th stepper be a forces veteran in recovery – we have a nationwide network of such people. This does have its advantages. Much in the same way that an alcoholic talking to another alcoholic forms an immediate level of understanding, serving personnel talking to a veteran seems to provide an immediate sense of camaraderie. Combine the two and this is extremely powerful.

We also cooperate with the HIVE network and a lot of the veterans charities, such as SSAFA

**Slide 25 – Contact details**

These are the official contact details.

Please note that the local helpline number is for Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. There are other numbers for other regions.

Added to this, and for if you have any later questions etc., my details are:

E-mail: aservices1.sc@aamail.org

Mobile: 07505 357698

**Slide 26 – Thank you**

Thank you for listening

I’m now open to questions

**Page 14 – Thank you**

Thank you for listening. I believe that a powerful message of hope was got across to 150,000 people, whilst working within the AA Traditions. I’ll now answer any questions that you may have – to the best of my ability