

June 2020

Beyond the Bars

Carrying the AA message of recovery in British prisons



Welcome to the summer edition of *Beyond the Bars*, a quarterly newsletter aimed at Regional PLOs and anyone interested in this vital aspect of service. Here you'll find articles, news and stories from AA members that reflect over 60-years of hands-on experience.

Short Term Fix

my name is Charlie and I am an alcoholic. I am writing this from 'A' Hall in Barlinnie, where I am serving time for something I did in a blackout. My drinking began at the age of ten - I guess I picked it up from my mum, as she is an alcoholic. I can't blame her, as my dad was shot dead in front of her. I was only a baby at the time of the shooting - at this time the area I grew up in was rough, with bombings and shootings a regular occurrence.

So I began drinking at ten with all the lads, which turned into a regular thing. I loved a drink with the boys, but at sixteen I calmed down, got a job and met a girl. By the time I was eighteen we lived together, had a kid, and things were good. But tragedy struck, when at two-months old, my daughter died. We found her dead. It was a cot death.

I went completely off the rails, I blamed my girlfriend and she blamed me, on and on. Now I am a broken man, using drink and drugs to try and escape what was going on in my head. I lost my job and soon I had to steal to get drink. I stole cars - I loved to drive and get chased from the police. But one night I was dropping a girl off, when a group of men with balaclavas tried to get me out of the car. I was drunk and ended up running through them. I thought this was okay. That's the madness of drink, no care for anyone but myself and drink.

Three months later the boys with the balaclavas pulled me out of bed, shot me, and put a machete into my head. After three-months in an intensive care unit, I was then exiled to Scotland. I thought it was a fresh start, but drink hadn't finished with me yet. I got drunk and robbed a shop and now I am serving 3 and 1/2 years in Barlinnie. So the lesson I have learned is that even through the madness and sadness, drink is only a short term fix.

I have been attending the AA meeting every Thursday in 'A' hall, and I can't thank AA enough for helping me. I am trying everything. I have a postal sponsor, and really look forward to getting letters. I am looking to start the programme in prison, but my healing will begin when I am out. Only this time I will use AA instead of drink.

Charlie

Barlinnie 'A' Hall

Over 30 Convictions Later

My first ever jail term came at the age of thirty. At a time when all my friends had gotten married, settled down and had families, I was on my way to jail. Was I surprised by all of this? On reflection, no.

I had had plenty of warnings going to court many times over the years for various offences ranging from breach of the peace to firearms offences.

I have been fined thousands of pounds over the years for football related violence. When that didn't seem to have any effect on me, my punishment was increased to community service, which ultimately led me to prison. Again, this did not have any effect on me as I continued to cause havoc all across the country following my beloved football team.

During this period alcohol played a significant part in my life. I couldn't see it at the time, as I thought that this was what young lads do on a Saturday. Go to the match with their mates and get 'steaming' and have a do with likeminded hooligans. Over thirty convictions later I was finally sentenced to five years imprisonment for grievous bodily harm.

Even in prison I was able to get hooch. I remember after one session I wanted to take one of the officers hostage, but the other prisoners declined. I still did not realise I had a drink problem. I was unaware of Alcoholics Anonymous and could not wait for my release so I could catch up on lost drinking time.

Upon release I continued to drink and my drinking got progressively worse never better. Going on benders for four or five days at a time, I turned into a liar and a cheat. As long as I was out drinking with my pals I did not care who I hurt, including cheating on my wife.

After many years of suffering my wife divorced me, I lost my job, was banned from driving, and had my house repossessed. During this period of my life my drinking really took off big time. I was to serve another jail term, but this time I was in the big league as I was up on firearms charges and looking at a fifteen-year sentence.

Upon my release I remarried and continued to drink. The same old pattern was developing by going on benders and cheating on my wife again. Everyone close to me suffered because of my drinking.

I finally contacted AA. However, I have to say that I only went to keep the wife quiet. Not going for myself to get well, I finally crumbled to the mental obsession for alcohol even after various lengths of sobriety. Why was I so weak willed, I asked myself on many occasions? I did not realise that it was the first drink that got me drunk. That once I took the first drink I was powerless over alcohol and was unable to stop.

My recovery hasn't been easy; in fact it has been very hard at times. However, I now attend AA for me. I have had to learn that when a crisis comes into my life I do not turn to the bottle. Living one day at a time with the support of the Fellowship and my sponsor I am sober today and that in itself is a miracle. For that I am truly grateful.

Patrick

(This story first appeared in the AA publication *Inside Stories*)

News Roundup

The future for prison meetings

While the rest of the country continues to recover from the effects of the coronavirus lockdown, the future for prison meetings is still uncertain. At the time of writing, only essential workers are permitted access to prisons, although this situation remains under ongoing review.

Some prisons have started a scheme that allows video meetings for prisoners and their families. Prisoners have also been issued with mobile phones, with access to restricted numbers only. The virtual meeting - a format used by many AA members in the community - may not be possible in prison due to the social distancing guidelines.

It's been suggested that liaison officers keep in contact with their local prisons to keep the lines of communication open.

Looking ahead

With the likelihood that restrictions will continue for some time, alternative ways of carrying the message will need to be found. AA publications such as *Roundabout* and *Share* are an ideal resource for prisoners, and like other forms of AA literature, can be sent in by post, or taken in by an authorised agent. This, of course, would rely on prior clearance from the prison authorities, but if permitted would be an effective way of maintaining contact.

Prison and postal sponsorship remains a priority, with the appropriate risk assessment also reviewed. AA's Prison Postal Service safeguards the writer and the recipient, and in this current climate is one more way to keep the communication system going until things change.



**DO YOU HAVE A DRINKING
PROBLEM?**

DO YOU WANT HELP?

RING ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS



020 3916 00 97

Polish-speaking Alcoholics Anonymous Helpline

Monday - Friday 19.00 - 21.00

Saturday, Sunday 17.00 - 21.00

www.aa-pik-wielkabrytania.org.pl

e-mail: pik.aa.london@gmail.com

Editor's Note: We would welcome any stories or articles from AA members willing to share their experience of life behind bars and how they found recovery. Also, the experiences of RPLOs within the prison system. Please email material to Adam: beyondthebars@aamail.org