

The Gift of Alcoholics Anonymous

To anyone who is not particularly familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous, there are four main things I always like to highlight:

1) AA is NOT a religious group in any way, shape or form and we welcome anyone with a desire to stop drinking, whatever views they may hold. We do not endorse or oppose anyone or anything, and purely follow our Primary Purpose: to help the still suffering Alcoholic.

2) We are not a “cult” and our 12 Steps (1939), 12 Traditions (1950) and 12 Concepts (1962) (also known as our “Three Legacies”) have clearly stood the test of time as they are as relevant today as they were when developed. Indeed, recent UK legislative requirements (e.g: Safeguarding) are dealt with (not **explicitly** but **implicitly**) by the Three Legacies.

3) AA is completely free of charge to the person who has a desire to stop drinking as we do not have any fees or dues for membership. I believe this has an enormous benefit to society as a whole because the various Addiction Practitioners & Services can help a person to stop drinking, but AA helps them to maintain their sobriety.

4) AA WORKS! Of this I am 100% certain. But in this day & age there is, of course, a desire for an evidence base for pretty much everything. Indeed, in my role as a Mental Health Clinical Risk Trainer & Consultant, I often hear people ask “Is this risk tool evidence based?” and this is a very appropriate question within that context. However, I maintain that I do not need a “Randomised Controlled Trial” to evidence that the Aircraft Industry Safety & Routine Maintenance approach helps to minimise airline disasters. In this vein, I know AA works as I have many friends who are sober today through our 12 Step Programme of Recovery. Many of these folk are a few years sober, some of them are decades sober, and a small number are over 50 years sober, so I can say with 100% confidence that AA WORKS!

For as long as I can remember, I have had a fascination with Alcoholics Anonymous, and back in 1994 I had the privilege of meeting an AA member locally: “Liquid Len from Loughton”. Yes, due to the “Anonymity” requirement, we do get some interesting names in our Fellowship, and Len suggested I attend an “Open” AA meeting which I did that year, and I was totally impressed with the way the meetings operate. I have been attending “Open” meetings ever since, and I have heard an immense amount of wisdom there which has been extremely beneficial to me as a Non-Alcoholic.

I didn't realise it at my first AA meeting, but the one thing that really struck me afterwards was the **Love** that was present in that meeting. When I say **Love**, this is really shorthand for patience, tolerance, acceptance, empathy, mutual support, and the sharing of experience, strength & hope, and this **Love** has been present in every AA meeting I have attended. Further, I find it absolutely striking that the people in the meetings are literally from all walks of life and truly are "people who would not normally mix", something which I don't think one can obtain in any other setting that I am aware of.

A late friend of mine ("Garston Mike") who was a long-time sober member of AA once advised me that the 12 Steps are "...*just certain principles which you apply in order to achieve certain outcomes...*", and I think his description beautifully summarises the AA Programme. In addition, I would personally suggest that the 12 Steps can work brilliantly well in dealing with life issues & challenges if the words "Alcohol" & "Alcoholics" are suitably replaced as appropriate.

I consider myself to be blessed to have met the late "Belfast Archie" who was an AA member who joined the Fellowship in 1963 and achieved just over 50 years of continuous sobriety. One of Archie's observations was that you see AA members as being "...*lovely well-dressed people comfortable in their own skins...*" ~ quite a transformation to when they were drinking!

Archie came to London in the early years of his sobriety, and he advised me that back in the mid-1960's there were only about eight AA meetings per week in the Greater London area; whereas, of course, these days there are so many that people are simply spoilt for choice. Additionally, in those days there were no mobile 'phones, and many people didn't even have a telephone at home so it wasn't easy to get to an AA meeting and stay sober, but as Archie pointed out: "...*it was easier than the way he was living when he was drinking...*". Given this fact, these days when I meet someone who is over 50 years sober, I remind myself it probably wasn't that easy for them in their early years of Recovery and their sobriety is all the more a massive achievement.

Another significant piece of historical information Belfast Archie educated me about was in respect of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland which broke out in 1968. In line with the 12 Traditions of AA, Archie was beautifully neutral about what happened during this difficult time, and he advised me that during "The Troubles", businesses were closing down, hospitals were struggling to function normally, but he said "...*the lights of Alcoholics Anonymous never went out...*". In addition, during this time I understand that Protestants & Catholics were to be found attending AA meetings together, and I believe this helps to demonstrate the energy of this wonderful Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, and I am not sure this type of love & acceptance can be found anywhere else in the World.

Bringing things up-to-date, in April, 2019 I was fortunate enough to be accepted on to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous UK Limited as a Non-Alcoholic Trustee (NAT), and as well as being extremely enjoyable & rewarding, I feel absolutely honoured to have been given this opportunity of being some service to our Fellowship.

I could go on for many more pages, but suffice it to say that I cannot recommend Alcoholics Anonymous more highly to anyone with an alcohol problem and a desire to stop drinking, or to any employer who wants to provide useful information & support to staff members who have a drinking problem.

Finally, and as I have written previously (AA Public Information Service News, October, 2019) *“So far as I am concerned, Alcoholics Anonymous is one of the most significant developments / social movements within the 20th & 21st Centuries, and there is much that other organisations, authorities, governments, etc. can learn from the way our Fellowship works and conducts itself. In particular, our inverted structure where the General Service Board carries out the wishes of the membership as agreed at Annual Conference is truly democratic in every sense of the word”*.

I believe that Alcoholics Anonymous is truly a gift to the World!

Andrew Wetherell

Non-Alcoholic Trustee, The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous (Great Britain) Ltd