



PI Service News

*"Easy does it.....
but do it!"*

Shared Service Experience



MAY 2020

Please pass on this newsletter to your friends in the Fellowship, either by forwarding via email or by printing copies to take to your local meetings. Anyone who wants their personal copy of the newsletter should send us their email address to the address below. You can also drop a line to GSO with any items for inclusion.

Please note the contact address: aainformation@gsogb.org.uk

Mid & North East Surrey I/G's Guildford P.I. Event. PILO Bob S reports:-

On 11th March, this event was held in a beautiful venue and the meeting was opened by the Mayor of Guildford, Councillor Richard Billington.

It was a joint effort. Mid Surrey Intergroup and North East Surrey Intergroup shared the workload and the cost.

It seems to have paid off. Our guests enjoyed the afternoon and found it very useful. I attach some photos of the food and meeting room.

In summary, 49 people registered to attend and 37 actually attended (despite the worsening news of the Coronavirus pandemic).

We received 25 completed feedback forms. We asked the attendees to rate the AA slide presentation, the Al-Anon talk, the Open Meeting Workshop, the Q&A session, and an overall rating for the event. In all cases the response was either 'good' or 'excellent'.

Organisations attending the event included Surrey Action for Carers, Surrey Police, Surrey Care Trust, NHS Alcohol Liaison Service, Catalyst, Amber Web (homes for addicted young people), Send women's prison, Weybridge / Guildford / Camberley / Horsham Job Centres, Voluntary Actions South West Surrey, Guildford Borough Council Community Wellbeing Team, Surrey County Council Choices Employability, Defence Community Mental Health Team and the South East Family Safeguarding Team.



“Better ideas than mine” Coventry and Warwick’s I/G’s ECLC Jeff B writes: -

“IT was a Sunday afternoon, and I wanted to find out something intriguing. How did these people who helped me stop drinking actually operate? What went on behind the scenes?

So, I attended my first Intergroup meeting, and made my first amazing discovery. It was the first meeting I’d ever attended that started and finished on time. I was deeply impressed.

After several visits as an observer, the Chairman announced there was a vacancy for a Public Information person. I looked around the room - nothing was said, and nobody moved. I’d worked in news media, so I tentatively put up my hand and offered “to help out”. Within seconds, I was nominated, seconded, and voted in as Public Information Liaison Officer.

I was concerned that I may have taken on too much, so I phoned an Old Timer for guidance. He reassured and encouraged me, so I began to contact a range of organisations to tell them about AA’s work.

My first PI visit was to the home of the county Magistrates Association Chair. I asked what she knew of AA, and she proudly declared: “It’s a religious organisation!” I quickly dispelled that myth.

My first joint PI venture was with a woman in AA before a large group of Citizens Advice volunteers. There was a room full of about 35 people, and they listened intently. All were fascinated that we called ourselves ‘alcoholics’ because we looked so well, they said.

One member of staff was interested when we said that people’s lives were transformed once they took responsibility for their drinking.

“We take the opposite view, “he said. “We believe that when we deal with someone’s relationships, benefits, housing and employment, they’ll stop drinking”.

I replied that I would have loved that. People running around sorting out my life – while I was in the pub drinking.

Over time, I’ve been involved with hospital and prison visits, served as Intergroup Chair, Region Treasurer as well as PI. I’ve been honoured to attend Conference and to serve Board responsibilities.

As Dr. Bob wrote: “I do it for four reasons. 1- Sense of duty 2- It is a pleasure 3 – Because in doing so I am paying the debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me 4 – Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip”.

Service has taught me a great deal – especially about respecting the views of others. It’s also shown me that other people often have better ideas than mine.

Intergroup News

North & East Ayrshire – *HLO Maurine D* has provided **Community Link Workers** in **North and East Ayrshire** with her contact details. **‘Roundabout’** is being distributed to **GP/Dentist** offices. *YPLO Neil* is liaising with *Regional YPLO Marc* for advice and ideas.

Chester City PILO Chris L reports a P.I. meeting at **Chester University**, with plans for a follow up “**Demonstration Meeting**”

Birmingham PILO Caroline G reports visiting **Women’s Aid**, with **Al-Anon**, to give information and literature.

4 Digitalised Posters were on display around the **Birmingham city centre**, for 3 weeks over Christmas (15th December to 5th January), at a greatly discounted cost by a generous and cooperative company called **Alight Media**. (Details from *Caroline G*)



An audio interview concerning Experience, Strength and Hope has been posted on **Birmingham Live** online as a written text and brief audio clip.

The “**Creating a Mentally Healthy Birmingham**” workshop was attended, resulting in adding A.A. details to the listings under “**Substance Misuse**” on the “**Birmingham and Solihull Health and Wellbeing services at your fingertips**” website.

A meeting with **Solihull Integrated Alcohol Services** re-established favourable contact.

A live phone-in chat on the “**Health and Wellbeing**” slot on **Solihull Radio** talked about the problem of alcoholism and how there is a solution.

A stand for **Network Rail** at the **Saltley Depot Maintenance Unit**, with **Al-Anon**, is leading to further P.I. opportunities, including workers with **West Brom Network Rail Maintenance**.

Informally ‘**Meeting and Greeting**’ **Solihull Councillors**, with **Al-Anon**, before the full Council Meeting, allowed A.A. literature to be placed on the 51 chairs in the Chamber.

Meeting with **Solihull Integrated Addiction Services** and **Public Health Solihull** has arranged for our 'blue postcards' to be put into the bulk mailing to **Solihull G.P.s**

An informal meeting at **Ward 1 of Mary Seacole House**, an NHS unit.

North East Surrey continue to attend the **Public Health Substances Misuse Forum**; a stand and literature provided, with **Mid Surrey** at the **NHS Surrey Borders** event for health professionals looking at other supportive therapies aimed at mental health and learning **disability services; literature and a stand provided at East Surrey Hospital as part of AA** awareness month; contact made with the **Surrey Primary Care Networks**; Awareness sessions given with the local substance misuse group; a meeting within the **White Post Psychiatric Hospital**; contact with the **Dental Team at NHS England**, presenting an AA awareness session.

YPLO Monica R reports: - East Surrey College Student Presentation

The **Gingerbread Project** has now been fully agreed by the College and sessions have taken place with amazing feedback, copies attached. Comments *include 'much better understanding of alcoholism', 'it's a disease, I didn't realise that'....*

5 sessions have been run all with amazing interaction from the students. The principle has had both verbal and written comments as to both how useful and interesting the talks were. The principle is keen to have the project as part of the curriculum and is sending 2 of her HR team to the PI event in March.

Plymouth have contacted by e-mail 'employment Plymouth', and all building suppliers and contractors. Regular talks given at **Derriford Hospital** and **Hamoaze House**.

North East Anglia PILO Tony W reports a talk, with questions and answers, given to trainee doctors at the **Roundwell Medical Centre, Norwich**; a visit made to **The Mathew Project hub, Norwich** leaving literature and posters, a new Open meeting being started; literature and posters for **Fakenham Medical Centre**; 'Talking Taboo' launch event attended at **Norwich Arts Centre**. A P.I. subcommittee has been set up.

Costa del Sol - PI report 3,000 new visitors to the website in 14 days after 6 months continued activity in the local press; School visits started at **Laude**, talks given to the British Legion, including in **Duquesa**.

Coventry and Warwick continue visits to **University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire**, and **Warwick Hospital**

Guernsey have produced an **Information Leaflet** for display at various sites, including the **Police Station**.

South Bedfordshire's PILO Pab K reports another 3-month Bus Advertising Campaign of 5 buses and our "you don't have to live here to be an alcoholic" Poster circulating between Luton and Dunstable at least 6 times a week. Value for money, I think. total cost was £1500 which is a lot cheaper than many other intergroups and regions whose costs often run into thousands for a 2-week campaign.



"I Saw It on The Bus!" Sarah's Story

My Experience

From my very earliest memory I was an anxious child. I worried, often justifiably, about my safety, security, my own health issues and those of my frequently ill father and brother. I was told that I was an inconvenience and deliberately lazy and unhelpful. I swallowed these messages whole and learnt from an early age to try to please other people to get my needs met. Life was about surviving, not joy or thriving. As kids, myself and my siblings were hard up financially and emotionally, living in a volatile atmosphere with an alcoholic mother and a father with both a gambling addiction and ferocious temper.

I worked out that hiding under the radar, wearing masks, and pretending to be coping seemed to satisfy others and keep me safest. I can never remember a time where I felt a true sense of belonging and not being on the outside with the dark shameful secret that I wasn't really ok. I cared deeply about what others thought of me and developed a crippling sense of self-consciousness. I felt depressed and terrified of the thought of being humiliated and laughed at.

Despite going to university, life with alcohol really began during my early twenties when I used it to mask social anxiety and self-medicate depression and romantic heartbreak. In my late twenties I used it to soothe isolation and fear as a new mother. My insidious relationship with alcohol, especially wine, began taking hold like a parasitic plant weaving through and clinging onto my life. I could snip it here and there, sometimes even prune it hard back for periods of time, but the roots had definitely taken hold.

Gradually, during a period of intense stress in my forties, this became more of a problem for me. I didn't get to the point where I lost everything, and I appreciate how fortunate I was to 'get away' with some key things; like my marriage surviving intact. I feel incredibly grateful that I managed to break the destructive cycle of alcohol abuse before any irreversible disasters occurred. That said, by the time I recognised I really did have an issue with alcohol, my life had become unmanageable enough. Waking up feeling physically unwell,

progressively depressed, mismanaging, and disrespecting relationships were all becoming a too familiar part of my daily existence. I was living a lie, coping on the outside and slowly dying inside.

My reality check occurred when, to my shock, my GP flagged up the beginnings of health problems caused by my lifestyle. By now, I knew that I wanted to stop drinking, but I was struggling to do this on my own. I had been in denial as I was still functioning somewhat and could choose not to drink on nights when I had to work the next day. I convinced myself that this was normal for all of the stressed-out wine lovers of my generation.

One day, I drove behind a bus with a picture of a woman just like me slumped over a bottle of wine, trying to drown her feelings out. It said something simple like 'AA can help you', I went to my nearest meeting and haven't taken a drink since. It hasn't been easy at times, but I have my life back and I am safely at the helm.

I understand now that although I have made some unhealthy, unhelpful, choices in life, much of this need to escape was based on the collateral damage caused in my early years. Alcohol had become a dangerous coping strategy to ease my immediate discomfort. It just took me a long time to recognise how cunning it is at fooling us into addiction.

As a sober adult I am able to have a sense of responsibility and understand that though my past is somewhat sad, it does not have to inform my future. There is hope and a new way of being to be found in the 12-step process. Step 4 allowed me to look at and let go of the past resentments that were weighing me down. As the philosopher Heidegger said, 'we can only authentically move into the future with resoluteness and anticipation rather than fear and control by owning our past and not denying it or asserting its irrelevance'. I love the promise of not regretting the past – I can learn from how things were and truly appreciate how things are now. I can offer hope to others and the hand of AA friendship that I hold tightly myself with deep gratitude.

Glasgow North West reports all going well at **Stobhill and Gartnavel**.

Cornwall's PILO John W reports schools' presentations at **Saltash and Penryn Colleges** with very pleasing feedback.

The presentation to the student nurses at **Treliske** went very well and the following feedback was received: -

- Very engaging speakers
- Really made me understand from another point of view
- It is relevant to all areas of practice
- It will make me more aware and understanding of my patients and not to judge
- Alcoholism is an illness
- Very inspiring
- I really appreciate and respect all three of you for sharing your stories and taking the time to try and change the stigma

- It has made me think differently, changed my perspective
- I feel I can educate other staff and increase their awareness
- This is relevant everywhere

A presentation given at **Boswyns** drug and alcohol treatment centre.

Leaflet stands provided, and being used, at **Callington and Liskeard libraries**

London West End's ELO Cait S spoke at the **Public Health England London Alcohol Sector Led Improvement (SLI) conference** on 14 January. The conference was attended by a wide selection of professionals from the public health sector. Fellow speakers included doctors, academics, policy makers, PHE senior management and the General London Assembly with workshops based on emerging projects.

London Ambulance Service (LAS) Cait has connected with the Head of Public Health Strategy and Operational Health Improvement at the London Ambulance Service. She is 'very excited' to work with AA as an employer and a public health care provider. LAS have an objective to build a better network with organisations interested in public health.

The joint initiatives we have agreed are:

- Liaise with Leadership, Education and Performance, People and Culture team regarding training for LAS HR and managers
- Liaise with Stakeholder Communications team regarding LAS patient and public environment scheme including posters in ambulances and social media
- Liaise with Department of Clinical Education & Standards team regarding LAS student wellbeing
- Liaise with People & Culture team regarding emergency service call centre staff training
- Liaise with Unison and GMB unions regarding LAS staff
- Review LAS alcohol misuse at work policy and guidance for managers

My journey in Service. PI Sub-committee member Jim S recalls: -

My first experience of AA was in 1969 when I was 21y.o. I was drinking surgical spirit daily for 10 months, a local GP told me the story of his best friend who had been sober for 20 years. The GP was a non-alcoholic, that experience illustrated the effectiveness of public information. During the next 6 years, I spent over 3 years in a psychiatric hospital, over this time AA members visited me. Eventually I arrived at a point of desperation and complete collapse. I had a spiritual experience in a hospital on 27/10/1976. From that day I have been sober, one day at a time. I went on to go to 'Pinel House' (the first treatment centre outside America). It was AA orientated. Then I lived in a half-way house for 15 months. I learned the concept of service in both these places, helping others in a community. I began to realise what a wonderful fellowship AA was (and is) I started to help at meetings, making tea, cleaning ash trays etc. Then I moved into a bedsit, about 300 yards from a local meeting. After a time, I became Secretary, a great learning curve. My sponsor encouraged me to travel to different meetings to ask people to speak at my home group. The more people I met, the more I was learning about the various types of service. I went to Intergroup which opened a magical door. I became a Probation Liaison Officer, Hospital Liaison Officer and got involved in Public Information. In 1982 I was elected Chairman of South London Intergroup, in those days SLIG

was huge, going from Reigate in Surrey to Brixton, taking in Croydon Epsom and Sutton. I went to Conference in 1983-85, that was an amazing experience, democracy in action, through the 12 Traditions. By this time, I was married, and my eldest daughter was born (I have three daughters and six grandchildren) and I was starting a career in Social Work. One PI task that was memorable was being interviewed by the BBC after the news at six, I recently found the VHS.

In my role as a Social Worker, I've always tried to carry the message in different ways. I was a care manager in substance misuse for 6 years in various London Boroughs. We were spending thousands of pounds sending clients to 12 step rehabs, I discovered that my colleagues didn't know what the 12 steps were. I devised a workshop on the AA programme for them. For the last 20 years I've travelled to rehabs, prisons and other places where people are recovering, to share my story with music.

I ran 'Recovery Holidays' near Barcelona 15 years ago, the joy of living in action. During the last few years, I presented 24 radio show where I interviewed people in recovery talking about their lives (respecting traditions) at the end of the programme the AA helpline was announced. I feel enormous gratitude for the opportunity to do service in AA, not just for the meaning and purpose it gives me, but for the way it's shown me how to be a 'citizen of the world' as Bill. W said.

And here I am, after a few years of serious health issues, elected to serve on the PI Sub committee, I attended a meeting in York just before lockdown. As we know, this too will pass, and with my 'Higher Power' and the principles of AA I'll live to serve another day.

CHAT NOW – further to the article in PISN April 2020 Part 2, it is the intention that the **Chat Now** responder puts the newcomer in touch with a **12-Stepper** for continued help with recovery, leaving the **Chat Now** line open for other newcomers.

PLEASE pass on your experiences to the address below. PI Service news is fortunate to receive a great deal of information from throughout Great Britain and Continental European Region. If anything you have sent hasn't appeared, please try again.

INTERGROUP SECRETARIES – please pass on Public Information Service News to Group Service Representatives, by e-mail or hard copy.

Please note the contact address: ainformation@gsogb.org.uk