

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



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* Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England¹

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published its policy paper on the future of the NHS in July. It is very disappointing to see little mention of alcohol harm, except this statement in the ‘Sickness to Prevention’ section: *‘We will tackle harmful alcohol consumption by introducing new standards for alcohol labelling. We will support further growth in the no- and low-alcohol market.’*

The Alcohol Health Alliance expressed deep concern that the majority of evidence-based policies to tackle alcohol harm were not included.² Its Chair, Professor Sir Ian Gilmour, said: *‘The Plan was a unique opportunity to move from simply treating illness to genuinely preventing it – to build a healthier nation and ease pressure on our overstretched health service. Alcohol harm... was rightly identified as a key area for action. For a moment, it looked as though the government might finally be ready to confront the toll alcohol takes on our society. Instead, that opportunity has been squandered.’*

According to the Times (June 4th), proposals for Minimum Unit Pricing for England and a ban on alcohol advertising were dropped ‘*after a backlash from the alcohol industry*’, which argued that these measures would harm the economy and lead to more pub closures. The Treasury and business departments added their concerns about extra pressure on the hospitality and retail sectors following last year’s national insurance rises.

* Alcohol and cancer

In July, there was a parliamentary debate on alcohol and cancer, proposed by Cat Smith MP (Labour, Lancaster and Wyre). There were many powerful contributions, including several calls for a new alcohol strategy for England. QAADRANT will include a detailed summary on this event in the Winter issue.

* Ireland: Health labelling on alcohol products

The Irish government announced in July that its long-planned introduction of labelling will be delayed until 2029. Sheila Gilheany, CEO of Alcohol Action Ireland, said that these were “*disappointing and bizarre*” comments to hear from the Government. Friends may remember Sheila discussing this and related issues in her QAADNET talk on March. The recording of her talk is available via our website.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future/fit-for-the-future-10-year-health-plan-for-england-executive-summary>

² <https://ahauk.org/news/nhs-plan>

Your voice

QAADRANT is enriched by different voices and ideas. We are always delighted to receive contributions from Friends of any length. If you would like to respond to an article, or share a concern or experience, please email or write to our Director by **27th October**.

His lucky day



We were particularly pleased to receive this excellent short story, written by a young attendee of Forres LM about a child's response to her father's gambling. As we wanted to include the story

in full, we have decided to publish it in two parts. Here is the first; the second will appear in the Winter issue.

Hedley was so excited. He pulled into the drive in a brand-new convertible and shivered with anticipation as he imagined telling Helen his news. He knocked four times on the front door, clutching a heavy brown envelope tight to his chest with his precious new money, then stepped back, trembling with excitement and nerves. Helen opened the door and peered out. She looked at Hedley and the brown envelope and a suspicious expression came over her face.

'Hello, what do you want here? You know you aren't welcome!' she said bitterly. Hedley was about to jump up and down he was so excited to tell her. *'I won loads of money at the horse race this morning!'* he said breathlessly. *'Now we can pay off all our debts, we can finally buy some new clothes and live a normal life without worrying about money all the time!'*

Just then Hedley's daughter came around the door. She was taller than the last time he had seen her. As soon as she saw Hedley, the same suspicious expression came over her face. *'Why are you here?'* she asked fiercely. *'Have you gone and spent all your money on pointless gambling then returned to us asking for help?'*

Hedley felt ashamed and looked down at his old muddy shoes with holes at the toes. He was longing for a new pair. *'Give him a chance and hear what he has to say, Ruby,'* said Helen

gently to her daughter. Ruby looked sceptical, but stayed quiet. *'I've just won a lot of money at the horse race and now we can pay everything and you can have new shoes and we can go on holidays. It's our lucky day!'*

Hedley looked down at the ground hoping Helen and Ruby could forgive him for wasting their money on gambling and they could be a family again. He looked up hopefully. Helen was beaming excitedly, however Ruby still looked unsure. Helen stepped back to welcome Hedley into his old home but Ruby moved forward and blocked his entrance. *'Do you promise you will never waste our money on gambling again?'* she asked fiercely. Hedley had forgotten how cautious she could be. *'Yes, I promise,'* he said. However, as he said it, he felt a small unsettled feeling of regret and temptation in his head.

Hedley soon forgot about it as he stepped into the house. Nearly nothing had changed. There was still the light blue, thin, threadbare carpet in the hall and the same old pots and pans in the kitchen. There were, however, bright flowers on the windowsills now, lighting up the room. Helen and Ruby went through to the kitchen leaving Hedley to look around. He saw a newspaper lying on the battered green sofa. He picked it up and opened it. He skimmed through a list of things happening in the town on the inside cover and was just about to flip over to the next page when his eye caught something: *'Horse race on this Saturday coming. Come along to bet on a horse. It might be your lucky day!'* Hedley felt that surge of temptation and excitement like he always did before gambling. Saturday was tomorrow! If he could win even more money they could live in luxury and have an amazing life. He could also keep a bit back for himself, he thought, to get another nice sports car and some new shoes. No one would

notice. The brown envelope in his pocket felt like it was burning as he was longing to spend it. He put the newspaper back down on the sofa and tried to stop thinking about it.

He wandered into the kitchen where Helen was at the stove and Ruby was chopping potatoes. There was a red notebook next to Ruby. As Hedley came in, she picked it up and put it in her pocket, eying him suspiciously. Helen looked around and smiled 'I've decided to make a beef casserole to welcome you back home,' she said warmly. Hedley sat down at the rough wooden table and the three of them enjoyed a delicious meal.

After dinner, Hedley put the brown envelope on the table, he and Helen started talking about the best ways to spend their new fortune; meanwhile Ruby went upstairs. They agreed to spend the money on new clothes, holidays, work on the house to make it more comfortable, and put the rest into savings. Hedley got up to

go but he hesitated in the doorway. 'Helen...' he began slowly 'Yes?' she said now concentrating on washing up. 'While I was looking around the house, I saw in the newspaper that there is a horse race on Saturday. I got so lucky this time, I thought maybe I could try again and I might be successful.' Helen spun around, shocked. 'How could you even think of that!? We have enough money now to have a nice comfortable life! Do you want to go ruining it and wasting our money on gambling? Think about what happened before! We nearly didn't have any food some days!' said Helen outraged, with a bit of fear in her voice. 'OK, don't worry Helen, of course I won't - it was only a thought' said Hedley calmly.

It is always particularly good to receive contributions from young Friends, and we hope that this story may inspire others to write for QAADRANT in the future.

QAADNET: Soberistas



In July, our latest online QAADNET meeting featured a talk by Lucy Rocca, founder and CEO of the charity Soberistas. This is a completely anonymous

and non-judgemental online community, available 24/7, which offers blogs and chat rooms. Its key principle is kindness and it is opposed to labels, believing that pigeon holing is not effective for a lot of people. It does not follow any set programme or protocols; the only requirement is that members have a problem with alcohol and want to get sober. The minimum age is 18.

Lucy began by describing her personal path to recovery, arriving in A&E 'depressed and self-destructive' in her mid-30s, following many years' drinking. She stopped that day and suffered no withdrawal symptoms, putting this down to having been a binge (not regular) drinker. Lucy described herself as 'very high functioning' – a physically fit law graduate who had run a half-marathon. As a single parent, she had been self-medicating with alcohol following divorce, but had never been in trouble with the law or social services. Over a decade later, she reflected on how difficult it was to find the support she needed in early sobriety.

At first, she attended some AA meetings and had support from a local drug and alcohol



service, but neither had worked for her. She stressed that AA *'is fantastic for some people'*, but finds the label 'alcoholic' depressing and does not feel that she had a 'disease'. Rather, she believes her drinking was driven by very strong social influences and the industry's power to cause a lot of damage through advertising and marketing. She said that alcohol is ingrained in British culture, and promoted as fun and glamorous. The reality is that it can cause anxiety, depression and self-loathing, and damage relationships.

'The problem is not the person, it is the product'

Lucy found physical exercise, meditation, and writing about her recovery really helped. She felt she needed to empower herself and saw sobriety as a positive change in her life. She said that alcohol is *'detrimental to the human spirit'*, leading to people to live 'apologetic lives'. Sobriety *'can restore self-worth and pride.'*

Launching Soberistas in 2012, she thought she was alone - neither an alcoholic nor a social drinker without an 'off' switch. Soon, she began hearing from others and realised that many people were in this 'grey' area: 20,000 people signed on to the website in the first year, the majority of whom were women. Soberistas was obviously meeting an unmet need. People said they were reluctant to talk to their GP, and mothers were worried about social services interventions. Instead, they were drinking behind closed doors.

Lucy talked about the power of shame, something Soberistas aims to eliminate: *'It can't survive when people talk about it.'* Anonymity is essential and she suggested that professionals, such as teachers and GPs, can find it particularly difficult to disclose what is

happening, leading to an extra level of stigma. Members are 'watchful' of each other, actively checking that others sound OK when online.

'Shame goes when stories are shared'

Lucy confirmed that Soberistas acts as a complementary resource to psychological or mental health advice, and not an alternative. Its team includes an addictions specialist GP who hosts its Ask a Doctor page, which includes links to NICE guidelines and other resources.

Soberistas is not prescriptive and has no rules about what can/cannot be discussed, including use of other drugs. Her personal view is that sobriety usually requires getting rid of all drugs to avoid transference to another addiction. She believes that abstinence is the better outcome, as alcohol is designed to be addictive, but Soberistas does not insist on this. A lot of members want to moderate their drinking to avoid being socially ostracised.

Lucy reflected that *'sobriety can feel like social exile'*, a very lonely place. For some, it can lead to an identity crisis when someone saw themselves as a 'party animal' only to find they are more introverted and socially cautious in recovery. This can affect relationships, especially when drink had been a central feature.

'Being a sober outsider feels lonely'

Whilst the charity does not offer direct support to children, Lucy said that parents influence their children's understanding about alcohol - often without realising it - through their own behaviour and attitudes. Many members report improvements in their relationships with their children, especially teenagers.



Soberistas members have taken up climbing; gone travelling; started businesses and changed careers. Lucy said she watches this *'with joy and pride'*. She feels that she has learned the power and the value of being vulnerable. *'Sobriety is not a deprivation – it is a radical form of self-love.'* Today, she goes to the gym, runs, has written five books, and focuses on her relationship with her family and friends. She feels *'deep gratitude'* and lives in the moment.

We had hoped to make a recording of Lucy's talk available on our website. We are very sorry that, due to technical problems, this has not been possible. If you are interested in hearing Lucy's media interviews, several are available on YouTube.

Further information about Soberistas can be found here: www.soberistas.com

NB: There is a 7-day free membership trial, followed by subscription options.

'A great friend but a terrible master'

We are very grateful to Colin Powell (Penarth LM) for contributing this article about the impact of alcohol addiction on his wife and family, and how a Welsh charity, the Living Room, helped them find renewed hope and health. Colin and his wife continue to volunteer with the charity, which is planning a relaunch this autumn, as the service has moved to new premises.

Her heart rate was increasing, her blood pressure dropping; she was pale and clammy. My wife was dying in front of me, and as a doctor, I was left in disbelief: how could I have let this happen? This morning, I had heard her vomiting, as usual. Every morning, before I woke, she would sneak out for a drink, hoping I wouldn't notice. I always did, I heard that familiar wretch, I just didn't know what to do. I felt helpless.

Today was different from the past six months of routine 'vomiting mornings'. The toilet bowl was full of blood. It had finally happened: her varicose veins had burst. God help us. Had we really reached this point? I felt like a failure and knew I needed to take her to the hospital. Julie and I met in school at the age of 14 and

had shared a wonderful journey filled with love and laughter, 'working hard and playing hard'. She supported me through school exams and my medical degree, and throughout various medical postings abroad and around the UK, all while raising two children. I achieved my dream of working at the largest children's hospital in the southern hemisphere and thought we were at the pinnacle of our success.

In focusing so much on my career, I presumed Julie would always be there, assumptions which were selfish and arrogant. I had completely missed two fundamental truths: I was oblivious to reality, swimming in my career success; and Julie was an alcoholic, drowning in white wine and gin. It ran in her family. Her mother and uncle had struggled with alcohol, and she had been raised in a pub. As a typical codependent, I was consumed by my self-importance and knowledge of wine, not noticing the disaster unfolding around me. Reflecting on this now, I feel deep shame.

Alcohol had taken over. The saying *'a great friend but a terrible master'* rings true. Alcohol creeps into life without permission, poisoning



relationships, inciting anger and hatred, and erasing compassion. I found myself delaying my return home from work, knowing how horrible it would be. I became stupefied in my career, avoiding my real world, which only made things worse. Our two children were living through this nightmare, while Julie, lost in her addiction, could hardly see the damage it caused. I don't think she cared; alcohol had consumed her.

At our first family support group, my younger son revealed his pain. He had two mothers: the one who cared for him and the one alcohol had taken from him. The more intoxicated she became, the angrier he grew. His behaviour worsened, leading to expulsion from school and, ultimately, he joined the Welsh Guards and went to fight in Afghanistan¹. It was a proud moment for us, but it killed me inside and was another blow to Julie. As a Quaker, I struggled to understand how he ended up in the army. He remained angry at alcohol, the army, authority, the world, and, most painfully, his mother. This was the final nail in the coffin. Our other son had moved out and was the 'forgotten' son. I have only realised recently the pain he was dealing with. He just quietly got on with it. I now know how much he cares and suffered. I feel ashamed of this too. Having cared for her dying parents at home, Julie was suffering greatly. Empty bottles littered the house and garden. Her self-esteem plummeted, she stopped eating, her face became bloated and red.

Attempts at rehabilitation and detoxification, through various programs, medications, and private care, all failed. I oscillated between caring too much and not enough, constantly questioning my approach. Reality hit hard when cirrhosis took over and she was admitted to hospital on that fateful morning in 2015. Thankfully, due to the exemplary care she

received, Julie did not die. We were discharged with two appointments over the next six months, but we felt desperate for help and needed it now. Where could we go?

The nurse who handed us a leaflet for the Living Room, an all-addiction recovery service, will never know the huge impact she had on our family. I call it the ripple effect: we all do things daily without knowing the true influence we have. Checking the website, we felt hope as we watched videos and called their number. We were invited to the unit the next day and were met with compassion and non-judgmental support. Julie was assessed by a psychologist, and her recovery journey began.

Today, she is 10 years sober and counting. Her liver has recovered and she is no longer on treatment. With the Living Room's support, she has become a Recovery Coach, helping others who have faced similar struggles. She attends at least two support meetings per week. We have our family back, though the journey remains challenging, and we have just celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary.

We are incredibly grateful to the Living Room which has proven to be what it claims: a groundbreaking, community-based recovery and day care centre for Cardiff and South Wales. It offers free, ongoing support (in English and Welsh) for anyone affected by addiction. If you or someone you know needs help, please reach out. They are there to care for you, empower you, and help you start a new addiction free life.

Contact the Living Room: Telephone:
0779 646 4045

Email: wynford@recovery-council.org

Crwys Church, 77 Richmond Road, Cardiff
CF24 3AR <https://www.recovery-council.org/>

1 A Thought for the Week article by Colin was published in the Friend: 'When the Doorbell Rings', 17 August 2012.

QAAD's new treasurer



We were very pleased to confirm Pete Warm (Plymouth LM) as QAAD's new treasurer and trustee at our AGM in June. Pete has been an active member of the LM for many years, serving as Elder, Treasurer and Clerk, and a member and Clerk of Devon AM Nominations Committee.

Pete is a director of The Firestone Society, a Community Benefit Society (CBS), providing finance for high-quality supported housing for people recovering from addiction. They currently have one house running for men and are purchasing another for women.

Thank you for your support

We have felt cheered and supported by the generous donations we have continued to receive from individuals, Meetings and Trusts during this difficult time. Donations are significant in two ways - they make us feel that our work is valued, and they give QAAD a longer-term future. In order to continue our work, we need to continue to draw down from our reserves which, of course, are not unlimited.

Please send your donation to: **Pete Warm, Treasurer, 16A Stone Hall Flats, Plymouth PL1 3QZ.**

Alternatively, if you would prefer to donate using a BACS transfer, our banks details are:

Account Name: Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs

A/C No: 31452673 Sort code: 400327.

If you can Gift Aid your donation, it will be enhanced by 25p for each £. Please complete the form below and return it with your donation.

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Contacting QAAD

If you would like to contact QAAD for any reason, please write to our Director, Alison Mather, by post: PO Box 34, Bristol BS6 5AS or email: alison@qaad.org You are also welcome to call her: 0117 9246981. All contact is held in strict confidence.