

**REPORT ON WALES, MIDLAND AND SOUTH WESTERN AREA
NINTH ANNUAL REUNION WEEKEND
8 – 10TH MARCH 2013 TORQUAY**

Saturday 9th March

The main business was conducted on the Saturday and three presentations were given prior to lunch. The first was by Dr Mandy Walker, MD Qi Results Ltd whose company looks at ways of changing the thinking and approach of enterprises to the challenges they face. Many of her points were echoed by the second presentation which was given by the Secretary General of RAFA, Jane Easton, the notes for which are detailed below.

Main points: Presentation by Jane Easton, Secretary General RAFA

Jane Easton's talk raised many questions for members to consider and put forward some ideas to help improve the two key issues which were:

Membership – how to expand it
Fundraising/income – how to improve it

RAFA is a big organisation with 65,000 members world-wide but this is 30,000 fewer than ten years ago

Every £1 spent has to be raised

Charity donations generally were down 20% in 2012 but Wings remained similar to 2011

The Trustees need to cover a small deficit of £500,000 which is not of major concern but it does need sorting. Costs/staff/redundancies are being reviewed to make an annual saving of £220,000. The membership is being asked how we can close the gap. Two suggestions are: change the way Airmail is distributed and possible collaboration with other charities.

Biggest proportion of spending is on welfare

Fundraising costs (staff and stock) were £2.1m in 2012

Membership costs were £1.3m (on staff etc). Only £600,000 was received from subscriptions. We need to look at these costs and to think about the voting system; she suggested considering one member, one vote.

Recruiting and retaining members:

Improvements have been made in recruiting under 30's from the RAF. The 60+ profile is healthy too. The problem is lack of active recruitment in the 30 – 55 age range; they need to be informed. How do we get the interest of RAF personnel who are busy, out in theatre, raising children, taking up more senior posts?

About 12,000 members are serving personnel many using GAYE (Give As You Earn).

A new youth membership scheme is to be started in August based on Facebook with a join and pay facility. This should double and re-double itself.

Retaining members:

The push to chase lapsed members in 2012 meant that the lowest lapsing rate for many years was achieved. Some members were brought back through welfare need. Should RAFA consider opening up more to members of the public who are interested in joining but who have not served in the RAF?

RAFA continues to support **servicing personnel** through:

- Miles More Minutes – this ended in Dec 2012. A new, video version is planned for 2013 to give minutes worth of conversation via the internet.
- Storybook Wings – this has proved very popular, more than 1400 done have been done now.
- Contact houses on 30 stations
- Parenting the RAF Families Federation which feeds evidence on issues of concern to serving personnel and their families re. housing, health, education, supporting the Armed Forces Covenant in doing so.

Fundraising is through:

- Wings
- Door to door fundraising partnerships
- Wings Pub Lotto – lotto machines are now in pubs.
- 70th Anniversary Challenge
- Brew for the Few
- Remembrance Garden (National Memorial Arboretum)

Council is piloting door to door fundraising, working with a professional company to try and get people to sign up to a direct debit, but not necessarily expecting them to be members. If they are on DD, there is an opportunity for local branches to make contact with them.

The Blades:

RAFA had a three year partnership with them which has now come to an end but aims to get the RAFA logo flying again with the RAF so the Tucano Display team will wear the logo and also The Falcons Parachute Display Team. The Red Arrows will support us too. RAFA is also working closely with the BofB Memorial Flight events team.

RAFA needs to work more closely with other RAF charities – there are many.

Areas of Influence

Should RAFA engage more with government ministers on issues of welfare etc?

Questions/concerns/information from the floor

A member informed the meeting that some councils have set up community covenants linked to the armed forces covenant. If a family relocates to an area, the council might look sympathetically at their needs.

Jane Easton replied that RAFA has been a part of making that happen. About 60% of councils have signed up to it but a lot is still aspirational. *(NB: does Shropshire Council have a community covenant?)*

Qu: If we move away from a membership funded organisation, will it affect the camaraderie?

Dr. Mandy Walker thought not. She suggested joining together with other charities (H4H?). She also strongly promoted the idea of opening up to the wider world using the web and social networking style sites eg. tapping into China's computer savvy youth, selling them models of aircraft (Red Arrows etc) online.

Qu: Concern was expressed from the floor about the difficulty of asking people for their help without having any knowledge of their background.

Jane Easton replied that we should consider opening up to people who are not quite like us, (this was to be a strong theme of both presentations). She advised against closing ourselves off from the outside world and rather, urged us to take instead, a gentle approach to welcome it. She felt the RAF has a mindset of looking after its own particularly in using its own charities. H4H put money into some facilities for RAF use but they do not transfer money to RAF coffers. She thought the RAF was probably not keen for them to do so.

Dr Walker quoted the PM when he said he wanted the right brains for future high-tech roles within the armed forces. Today's youth, she said, is extremely interested and more than able in the use of high-tech systems, for example, security systems such as ISTAR – Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance – ie gathering battlefield information). RAFA needs to work along similar lines in using modern thinking and technology to breach not only the generational gaps but in reaching as wide an audience as possible.

One member told of a local pub that had set up a rehab room for those returning from Afghanistan.

It was suggested that RAFA members make stronger links with their local cadets by visiting them (an enticement was the fact that they have simulators!) and to have cadets shadow branch committee members at meetings etc.

Other points put forward to consider:

- Do we need areas and area conferences/events?
- Come 2016/17 when Afghanistan is over, the public will switch off and it will become increasingly harder to get their interest – another challenge.

The third presentation of the morning was given by Sqn Ldr Shaun Pascoe from the RAF's Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT). His talk demonstrated the speed, skill and commitment of teams working to save lives on the front line in Afghanistan. His presentation showed the cramped urgency of working in the back of Chinooks and was extremely moving. He received a standing ovation.

After lunch, a fourth presentation was given by Wing Cdr Phil Lamb, Officer Commanding RAF St Mawgan, near Newquay in Cornwall and the only RAF station west of Oxfordshire. Military flying operations came to an end there in 2008 and the station is now the home for the SERE School (Survive, Evade, Resist, Extract). The main function of the station is to provide admin support to the school in delivering up to 5000 SERE trained personnel a year.

The AGM followed Wg Cdr Lamb's talk. (*Minutes received by our Secretary?*)

The Venue

The hotel food and service were excellent. The week-end was full with presentations, the area standard bearer's competition, the Sunday morning service and various entertainments in the evenings, all of them very good. Perhaps the

highlight of Saturday night was the donning of a knitted green bonnet by Air Marshall Sir Dusty Miller in a version of pass the parcel that involved a ring of male participants putting on items of female clothing.

A. Madeley
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