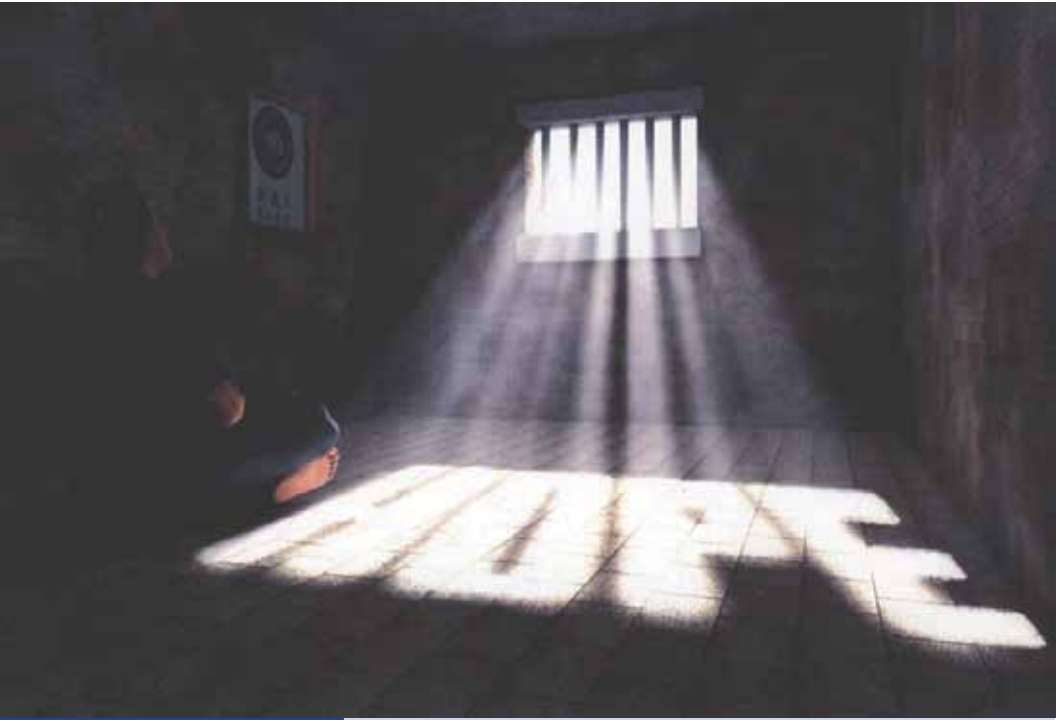


Volume 28, Number 2

# Reaching Out

April 2013



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*“The message is that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. Our message is hope and the promise of freedom.”*

BASIC TEXT, TRADITION FIVE

# From the Editor

Welcome to *Reaching Out*! Whether you are experiencing recovery on the inside or on the outside, this NA World Services newsletter is for you. As our literature says, “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.” *Reaching Out* is designed to help incarcerated addicts connect to the NA program and enhance H&I efforts.

There are two sections; “From the Inside” is filled with letters from incarcerated addicts sharing their experience, strength, and hope as they find and maintain recovery from addiction through NA. In the second section, “From the Outside,” NA members on the outside and Hospitals & Institutions subcommittees have a chance to offer their experience, strength, and hope. Many of these letters come from members who are deeply committed to carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the NA message on the inside and are now living and enjoying life on the outside.

We encourage submissions for *Reaching Out* from members and H&I subcommittees. Please consider that we are more likely to publish articles that focus on how NA has helped an individual to recover while incarcerated, rather than those that concentrate on the horrors of addiction. Thank you for helping us carry our message of hope!

Send all submissions to *Reaching Out*; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to [HandI@na.org](mailto:HandI@na.org).

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
July 2013	15 April 2013
October 2013	15 July 2013
January 2014	5 October 2013
April 2014	15 January 2014



# From the Inside

## *Dear Reaching Out,*

I recently transferred from a county prison to a state institution. While I was in county jail, an NA member came to the jail to chair a meeting. Since I am stubborn, I didn't attend, but a fellow inmate went and brought back some literature. I had already been to a rehab, a halfway house, and so on, and remained unsuccessful at staying clean, so my tolerance for NA at that time was next to nothing. However, a couple of pamphlets caught my attention, one of which was *Reaching Out*. I related to every letter in one way or another. A letter from SB in Kansas really drew me in. Being alone was familiar to me at this point in my life, having just buried my mother a few months earlier. And I am currently incarcerated, which gives me time to reflect.

Although I don't have *The NA Step Working Guides* that I desperately want and need, I am working my steps anyway. I am on Step Four and have been for a few months, but doing it alone is the absolute worst way to go about recovery. I need a sponsor. Everyone who is serious about recovery needs a sponsor. That was one of the first steps to my relapse—no support, no sponsor. I thought I could do it all alone. Well, look at me now! SB, I now want what you have. Your story inspired me. I've been working on myself since I've been in prison, and I'll be out in less than three months. There is hope and understanding, and there are ears that listen in NA, and they are my only hope of recovering. To them and people like SB in Kansas who share their experience, strength, and hope, thank you so much! Thank you, *Reaching Out*, for putting out a publication that really reaches out.

CD, PA

## *Dear Reaching Out,*

Today, I remain in prison yet am freer inside than I have ever been. My name is L and I was raised by the Juvenile Department of Corrections, where I learned what I thought it was to be a man. Being locked up from an early age, I had heard of Narcotics Anonymous, yet I didn't relate to what meetings were all about. In my mind, I hadn't lived the life of a "true" addict. Several times I was on parole and did my best to make up for lost time, filling my life with things that I thought living was all about. Each time I found myself more alone and suffering, wanting to end my life.

With this incarceration, I made a decision to do things differently; yet I found myself involved in the yard drama that landed me in segregation. Once free from segregation, I signed up for NA so I could get out of my cell for an hour a week. When I arrived at the meeting, I met up with people whom I have served prison years with, yet they were not the same. The things they spoke about I wanted. They openly shared, and I could relate. The NA meetings were real, and I could feel a change within me during meetings. The meetings helped me keep my goals in perspective and helped me stay out of the drama of the yard.

Something was working; I spoke up. I needed more and felt an inner push. I made a commitment to be real and give this thing, NA, an honest go. This meant I needed to do some step work. I chose a sponsor whom I felt I could trust. Trusting was impossible for me, so this was a huge step. I have done all Twelve Steps and live them to the best of my ability every day of my life now. I sponsor people. I put in time to better myself spiritually, and I have accomplished an entirely new outlook on life.

I find it difficult to describe my inner change, so I will use these words from *The NA Step Working Guides*: "Working the Tenth Step makes it possible for us to achieve more balance and harmony in our lives. We find that we're happy and serene more often than not. Feeling out of sorts becomes so rare that, when it does happen, it's a signal that something

is wrong. We can readily identify the cause of our discomfort by taking a personal inventory. The personal freedom that has been building since we began working the steps yields an increase in our choices and options. We have total freedom to create any kind of life we want for ourselves. We begin to look for meaning and purpose in our lives. We ask ourselves if the lifestyle we have chosen helps the still-suffering addict or makes the world a better place in some other way. What we are searching for, we'll find in the Eleventh Step."

NA has changed me in so many ways. The selflessness and compassion I have today I could not have imagined before. Today, I have knowledge that helps me deal with my emotions and remain humble. I lost nothing but those defects. I choose to change; I am a person I like. My new friends are true friends. Today I know what it means to be clean.

Being a member of NA means I have a life of my choosing that I love and embrace. I am thankful for things in my life that I once took for granted. NA has woken me up spiritually and mentally and helps me every day. I have been clean eleven months. Today I have self-respect, and it works because I live it. Thank you.

LH, OR

## *Dear Reaching Out,*

First of all, thank you so much for being of service in a manner that is so desperately needed for the incarcerated addicts who seek recovery. I appreciate beyond words the effort, time, care, concern, and love that NA puts into providing this communication for the incarcerated addict. *Reaching Out* helps me feel a part of the recovery community and the NA family that I have been blessed to be a part of for over 19 years of my life.

My name is AJ and I'm currently serving time in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Thanks to H&I, I'm blessed with a clean date of 11 August 1992, when members of H&I found me lost and desolate in a correctional unit in Texas. H&I carried the message of hope and the promise of freedom to me in that facility; for the first time in my using life of 27 years, I saw I had a problem, me, and that there is a way: The Twelve Steps could help me.

I was released from prison 5 June 1997 and was at my first “freeworld” NA meeting the very next day in Texas. As my HP would have it, I ran into the same individual who had carried the H&I message to me in jail, and I latched onto him as my sponsor. He is the best sponsor the world had to offer, and I love him like crazy. It is the spirit of recovery that binds us together. On the surface, one can see differences. My sponsor is a heterosexual male and I am transgendered; my sponsor told me right off that our differences are not important. All that matters is that I wanted to stay clean and he is willing to help me. I was blessed with this man as my sponsor with his unconditional love for close to 18 years of my recovery. He took me to meetings, he got me oriented to do H&I service, and for years we did H&I meetings together. My sponsor taught me about selfless service and how important it is to lead by example.

My sponsor supported me being a group service representative and attending area and regional service committee meetings. I worked the Twelve Steps and Traditions with him, and he was the type of sponsor who had me work the steps in order, One through Twelve, and when we finished, I started over with Step One. It was all about commitment for him, and he passed this precious gift on to me; I, in turn, passed it on to others. Such was my life—blessed with the privilege of sponsoring several men in their recovery journey with some of the men coming straight out of prison. Nothing fulfilled my spirit more than being able to go back into the prison units where I had spent 17½ years of my life serving time and letting the guys know there was a way through the fellowship of NA. It worked for me and it could work for them.

In 2007, I had the privilege of serving on the World Convention Support Committee for the convention in Texas. This was a spiritual commitment that still brings tears to my eyes. This commitment was truly a gift from my HP and the fellowship of NA. My spirit was touched by addicts from throughout our worldwide fellowship as we celebrated the gift of recovery.

And here I am today, back in prison. Nope—I still have the same clean date. One thing that I did learn in my years of recovery is “Don’t Use No Matter What!” I live by that and cherish my clean date for all

it is. But I have a disease, and using drugs is just a symptom. My disease manifests itself in many ways within me. Today I know without a doubt that despite cleantime and years of meetings, service, working the steps, and having a sponsor, it can sneak up on me and cause havoc.

I am currently working with a sponsor through the mail, and I hope that through working the steps again I will receive some freedom again from the disease of addiction that is incurable and ever-so-powerful. My hope lies in the fact that I did not use and there is someone in NA who cares enough about me to help me sort through the chaos I created for myself. The solution, once again, will come from working the Twelve Steps, grabbing hold of the principles, and applying the principles to my life. Thank God hope is alive.

AJ, TX

## *Dear Reaching Out,*

My name is SWA and I am an addict incarcerated in Maryland. Like so many of us, I have struggled with addiction throughout my life. I would like to share a bit about gratitude regarding “NA Behind the Walls.”

I have been incarcerated since 2008 and started writing to “NA Behind the Walls” in 2009. At first, I didn’t know what to expect. I knew I needed to speak with someone who knew what I was going through. Though I have never personally met DE, I consider him the sponsor I always needed. He has been there for me from the beginning, sharing his encouragement, experience, strength, and hope. With him I have worked the Twelve Steps for the first time since learning about NA in 1988. DE has provided for me much more than I could imagine, but what the fellowship promises is unconditional love and freedom from active addiction. DE’s letters have always been “on time” when I needed to hear from him—not when I wanted them.

Prison is a very lonely place. When there was no one available, he was there and understood. All I needed to do was my part. Stay clean, learn patience, and have faith in the process of recovery. I wake up each

day still behind the walls, but free! I have now progressed from medium status to prerelease status, something I thought I would never see. I am parole-eligible in November 2012, but remaining clean one day at a time is most important. I work a vigorous, diligent program and believe what I could never see—me being clean. Thank you, “NA Behind the Walls,” thank you to my NA family, and thank you, DE.

NA works if you work it!

SWA, MD



Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented art. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act, and images provide a powerful message of the freedom we can find in NA.

If you would like to see your art printed here, please send jpeg or pdf files to [Handl@na.org](mailto:Handl@na.org) or mail to: Reaching Out; c/o NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409.





# From the Outside

## *Dear Reaching Out,*

My name is Jay M, my clean date is 20 July 1993, and I got involved in H&I service in 1998. I am from one of the boroughs of New York City, NY. After attending six months of subcommittee meetings, I was given my first H&I commitment as a panel leader; I continued as panel leader for several facilities for a few years. After that, I accepted the position as panel coordinator and continued to serve in that capacity for several years. In 2010, I was nominated to and accepted the responsibility of an area H&I chairperson. Following that two-year term, I served as a presentation coordinator. Simultaneously with the presentation coordinator position, I served the region as H&I vice chairperson. Currently, I am serving my region as H&I chairperson.

My involvement with H&I began with my detox in July 1993, when an H&I member, O, came into the facility to share his experience, strength, and hope. I was so moved by his message that it brought tears to my eyes. I said to myself that if I could take his suggestions and stay clean, one day I wanted to be able to carry the NA message into a facility and hopefully do for another sick and suffering addict that which was done for me.

H&I has impacted my recovery in many ways. For one, it epitomizes our belief that you can't keep what you have unless you give it away. It is a wonderful way for me to practice the Twelfth Step. H&I service is a constant reminder that if I don't practice this program to the best of my ability, I, too, can relapse. Serving in H&I has helped me practice many spiritual principles, such as humility, patience, tolerance, benevolence, and unconditional love. I have learned so much about commitment through doing H&I service. This service has helped in building my esteem to a point where I have developed the courage to become a leader in doing selfless service. These principles continue to help me tremendously in my personal and professional life experiences.

I think the H&I experience that stands out the most was when I attended my regional convention and saw the recovering addict, O, who brought the message to me in detox. This was about three years after detox, and I approached him and let him know who I was and where I had met him, and was able to say thank you, letting him know that I was still clean.

I would like to say to my brothers and sisters on the inside that there is hope after drugs and the lifestyle that goes along with them. Recovery is the best choice I ever made in my life, and you can do it. I suggest the same thing that was suggested to me 19 years ago—give yourself a break and go to meetings. “Meeting makers make it” and “You can’t keep it unless you give it away” are still my favorite slogans. Don’t worry; many of our members have been formerly incarcerated and they have come home and stayed clean to become productive members of society. Then, they have been able to share their own miracle stories and give hope to other addicts. Our literature states that “lost dreams awaken and new possibilities arise.” Mine continue to do so, and so can yours.

JM, NY

## *Dear Reaching Out,*

Hi. I am an addict, and my name is S. Even as a little boy it seemed as if something in me cried out for destruction and failure. No amount of beatings from my dad could get me to be “good.” There was no consequence sufficient to alleviate my seeming need to fail at everything I was involved in. I don’t know why I am the way I am, or did the things I did, except that I always found myself doing that which caused hardship. I used to think I had to figure out why I was the way I was if I was ever going to know how to not be that way—that is, until I found NA, and learned that I had a disease over which I was powerless. No amount of self-knowledge was going to fix what was wrong with me. I had known for a long time that I did not like prison, and yet I spent more than 15 years in one or another of California’s prisons. I knew I did not like to be hit, and yet I would purposely do things that would

anger the meanest man I knew: my father. I knew that I did not want to be alone, and yet I would rather have died than tell anybody that. I used drugs well past the point where I wanted to stop, but was completely unable to, even though I knew they were killing me.

I had what I think of now as a fractured personality. Something in my brain, or my heart, was not working correctly. The synapses were not firing right, or the wiring was not hooked up correctly ... like I said, I don't know. Once I found drugs, none of that mattered anymore. Drugs relieved me, if only for a time, of the sadness, loneliness, and confusion that ruled my life. I did not put it together that the drug use was causing the unmanageability in my life, probably because I was always in trouble before I ever did drugs. The relief I got from drugs almost seemed to be worth the trouble. Almost. After many years of prison, heartache, fear, and being completely alone in the security housing unit, in ad-seg, or single-celled in the general population, I decided I did not want the life I had anymore. It wasn't until I was 30 years old that I realized how much pain I was causing myself and wondered if there was another way to live. It was at that point that I found Narcotics Anonymous. To be more accurate, NA found me.

I was looking for work on one of my few brief stints outside of prison when a clean member of NA gave me a job in his tree-trimming company and commenced "twelve-stepping" me, or telling me about the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I could sense that he was an addict like me, except his life did not look like mine. He did not run out of money like I did. He was happy much of the time, unlike me. Most notably, he did not talk about the kinds of things that I thought men like us were supposed to talk about. He would notice the birds, and I would talk about fighting. He would talk about forgiveness, and I would want to "get that guy." This old Vietnam veteran, biker tough guy was the most gentle and loving man I had ever known. It did not add up for me in the beginning, except that I knew it had something to do with his being clean and in NA.

Initially, I did not want what he had as far as the "Mister Nice Guy" stuff went, but I did want to stop going to prison, running out of money,

and living life as a desperate and dying addict. So I took a suggestion from him and started going to NA meetings and trying out the program for myself. Immediately I noticed the program working in the lives of the people at the meetings, and decided I wanted a new life for myself, too. I did what they did and got what they had: hope. The message that I could live without drugs, one day at a time, and find a new way of life was coming true for me, like it had for those around me. I went to a lot of meetings, met people, got a sponsor, and worked the Twelve Steps, and my life changed drastically. I had made it out of the clutches of the disease of addiction alive, and I was not looking back.

I have been clean since December 2004, and have been growing up in Narcotics Anonymous. When I arrived in NA, I did not have very many skills for living life. I was overwhelmed much of the time by things that other people seemed to be taking in stride. Getting a driver's license, writing checks and giving them to people I owed money to without them having to "sweat" me, and just showing up day in and day out where I said I would be were all behaviors I had to learn. Through the recovery process, I learned how to seek and follow up on the suggestions from the people around me, and as a result I don't get high and my life gets better.

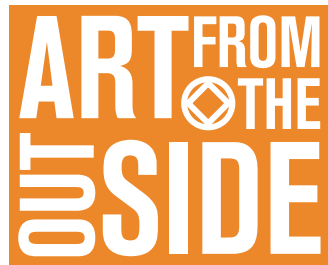
Narcotics Anonymous has given me all that I have. I am a loving and attentive husband and father. My son does not fear me. I am not the meanest guy he knows. I attend the University of California, Berkeley, where I am accountable and where I work on my degree the NA way: one day at a time. I have friends who stand the test of time. Sometimes they need me and sometimes I need them. Even when we disagree, argue, and get mad at each other, we do not leave each other. In NA we do not often walk away from each other, whereas in my old life people were only kept around as long as they were of some use.

Another gift of NA is that my family of addicts like me has watched me live the NA way of life and followed me into recovery. When once I was the absolute worst of the worst in my family, I now show up for my family as a stable and spiritual influence that they can rely on. I used to sit on my bunk in prison and wonder what my family was going to

do for me, and how much, and how often. Usually I was disappointed. I wore them out. Today I am on the other end of that equation, and I can be there for them when they need me.

The most profound gift of living clean in Narcotics Anonymous has been the recovery that is happening inside of me. I used to be ruled by my emotions of anger, resentment, and fear. Today if something does not go the way I had planned or hoped, it is not the end of the world or even that big of a deal. Life's little problems used to be catastrophes that would spin me out, sending me over the edge, back to the drugs and the consequences drugs bring. Today my life is ruled by stability and peace. The message of Narcotics Anonymous is hope and the promise is freedom from active addiction. Narcotics Anonymous is a proven program of recovery that works for everyone who lives the NA way of life.

Thank you NA – S, CA



*Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented art. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act, and images provide a powerful message of the freedom we can find in NA.*

## Unity Day Call

### Narcotics Anonymous World Convention

We invite all institutions to join us via phone link in the celebration of recovery at the World Convention of NA on Sunday, 1 September 2013. This is a free service to institutions; the call will last two hours. Inmates will be able to hear the NA meeting readings and the main speaker at the closing meeting of the world convention which is being held in Philadelphia, PA.

This is an opportunity to make a connection to the worldwide NA Fellowship and hear the powerful message of recovery. All that is required is a standard telephone line. If you are a large institutional group, we suggest that a speaker system be connected to the phone. We look forward to you all joining us!

If an institution is interested in participating, please contact Colin C, 818.773.9999 ext 125, or [colinc@na.org](mailto:colinc@na.org). Cutoff date for registration is 1 August 2013.



“When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man’s entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous.”

*Narcotics Anonymous, “We Do Recover”*

# Order Form

*Reaching Out* is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available free of charge to incarcerated addicts through Narcotics Anonymous World Services. If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months and would like a free subscription to *Reaching Out*, complete and return the following form.

*Reaching Out* is also available by a 20-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$32.60 annually. If you are interested in purchasing a bulk subscription, please complete the following form and return it along with a check or money order.

I am an incarcerated addict (and will be for at least six more months) and want a free subscription to *Reaching Out*.

I want to purchase \_\_\_\_\_ 20-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$32.60 each, total \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

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***Reaching Out***

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