

Reaching Out



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From the Editor

We would like to welcome all of you to the NA World Services newsletter, Reaching Out. We hope that the contents of this newsletter will assist you in your recovery or H&I efforts. There are two sections to Reaching Out. The first section, "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.

The second section, "From the Outside," is an opportunity for H&I subcommittees to offer their experiences obtained through 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 drug use. Send all submissions to Reaching Out c/o NAWs, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999, USA.

**GET INVOLVED AND HELP US CARRY OUT OUR
FELLOWSHIP'S PRIMARY PURPOSE!!**



Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
April 2008	15 January 2008
July 2007	15 April 2008
October 2008	15 July 2008
January 2009	15 October 2008



You may notice that we have made few changes to the look of Reaching Out. As part of that, we are trying out new cover art. We are interested in your thoughts, so please send your input to let us know what you think.

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear Reaching Out,

I am a recovering addict named M. I am grateful to the recovering person who sent me our newsletter. I am currently confined in prison, and according to them I will be here for the rest of my life. I don't agree; this fight is far from over. What I do know is that I could not stay clean when I was free, and now I have two years and three months clean and I am so happy I'm not sure what to say or do sometimes. Don't get it twisted; prison sucks. I very much despise being here most of the time, but even so, when I focus on my little bit of clean time I can't help but smile. I believed in this program from day one, but time and time again I would betray the very beliefs and people I loved the most. So to have a little clean time is a really big deal to me.

As far as the recovery part goes, the steps, I have a long way to go. I have no sponsor and I don't want to just start doing this my way; after all, this is how I got here. I am not confused. If they let me go today and I have not changed, I will use again. I never want to use again, so I must work on changing. I need a guide. Until my sponsor does show, and I know that will happen, I would very much like to continue to receive our Reaching Out paper. The one I was sent made me feel like I was at a meeting, and I did not feel alone anymore. For whatever reason, there is no H&I service work here, nobody from outside to chair any meeting, and the only thing even close is a class they give for a time cut. I can't go to that one because I have a lot of numbers on my paperwork, plus I am not looking for a time cut. I just want some NA meetings in here.

I look forward to the next newsletter, to attending the next meeting.

Thank you,
MS, Indiana

Dear Reaching Out,

I just recently transferred from a county prison to a state institution. While I was in county jail, a chairperson came to the jail for a meeting. Me being stubborn, I didn't attend, but a fellow inmate went and brought back some literature. I had already been to a rehab, half-way 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, and one was Reaching Out. I relate to every letter in one way or another. A letter from SB in Kansas really drew me in. Being alone is so familiar to me at this point in my life, having just buried my mother a few months ago. And currently being incarcerated gives a person time to reflect.

Although I don't have the 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 alone is the absolute worst way to go about recovery. I need a sponsor. Everyone needs a sponsor who is serious about recovery. That was one of my 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 now. 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, Pennsylvania

Dear Reaching Out,

I've been thinking about writing this letter for about two months now. I no longer want to use drugs of any kind ever again, and I am proud to admit it. Willpower is not enough in and of itself, but it is a good thing to start with. Today I am willing to take action. To make progress, acting on my own decisions, I work the steps with a sponsor by mail. I am in prison. Today it's important to follow NA recovery first. I take my sponsor's suggestions. Why do prisoners immediately clam up and shy away every time they see me working or reading the NA program? I know these people are here for

drug crimes. Well, of course, all I have to do to answer this question is look at myself and my history. I used twenty-five years to get where I am and to finally suffer enough pain to become honest and open-minded enough to be willing to try something different—NA. It is a program of attraction rather than promotion. If I stay clean, improve, and generally act as a good example of what NA has done for me, success is achieved. The message is carried forward. Thank my Higher Power!

I'm forty-one, behind the razor wire for another seventy months. Thanks to this fellowship I've got recovery material to read and people to write to. The desire not to use is strong, and thanks to my Higher Power my clean time totals one year and two months, no mind-altering chemicals whatsoever. This is the longest I've been clean since age thirteen—amazing! What I have come to realize is that a desire, although a good place to start, is not enough. This decision for me must be supported by action. What action? Good question. Twenty-seven years using made me an expert at doing dope, but I had no skills at staying clean. So I asked for help from former addicts in recovery who no longer use. Using addicts can teach me to get high, and clean addicts can teach me to stay clean. Simple, and it makes sense.

As logical as it sounds, asking for help was very hard, but I had made this decision not to use and wanted to figure out how to stay clean. Asking for help, admitting that I needed help, that I could not do it alone, that I didn't have all the answers, that maybe I wasn't strong enough to do it on my own by willpower alone, went against every fiber of my being. I've always been a leader, strong, basically an arrogant, self-centered hardhead who was smarter than anyone else. It took a lot of humility to become honest about not being able to do it alone, about being willing to take suggestions, and about being open-minded enough to accept this suggestion about staying clean through NA. I know this is really hard to do in prison, but it is possible.

There were no NA meetings in this prison. So I kept asking one of my friends (by phone, of course) to go to a meeting house and buy me an NA Basic Text. I even knew where meetings were held in her area because fifteen years ago a judge made me go as a punishment for another offense, a blessing in disguise. Well, she was still using and wasn't able to find the time—ha, ha, right. After my continu-

ally asking, she finally bought me the book, and in the process got to a meeting herself. She just celebrated one year clean. What a miracle!

I read the book. Most of the action I needed to take was listed in the Basic Text: read the NA literature, go to meetings, work the steps, and get a sponsor. I read the Basic Text every morning. After I wrote NA World Services they sent more material to read. Since there were no official meetings here, a few guys got together to start a small, impromptu meeting. We took turns reading the book and talked about wanting to stay clean. In order to work the steps, I needed a sponsor. Remember, I didn't know how to stay clean. I needed direction, someone to show me how. What a nightmare—I had to trust someone and admit I needed help. This is fast becoming one of the best experiences of my life. It was amazing how easy it was once I just asked for help.

Again I turned to my friend who brought the Basic Text for me, the one with a year clean. She met a guy at an NA conference and asked for his address. He suggested I write him a letter. I was kind of scared, didn't know if he would help me or not, or if he would understand what being in prison was like. It turns out that he spent twelve years in prison and now has fifteen years clean. My Higher Power surely provides, as long as I take action and don't use.

I'm still in prison and working on Step Two. This program is truly amazing. I really wanted to let everyone know that recovery is possible, even in prison.

Respectfully submitted,
JW, Louisiana

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is J and I am an addict. Oh, what a powerful statement that is. I am extremely grateful to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous for providing to me a vessel in which I can climb aboard and sail onward in my personal journey of life. I have been incarcerated for the last thirteen years and will be returning to society in the early part of 2008. I decided to check out a Tuesday night meeting in May of 2006. Well, the feelings, the emotions, the support, the love, the overall feelings of not being alone any longer totally overcame my entire being. How do I describe it? I truly didn't think I could do that.

I have participated in numerous rehabilitative programs, well over eighty such programs, and I am currently involved in an intensive inpatient block program for dealing with the exact elements of my crime. These programs have prepared me with the courage that I needed to actually attend a meeting of NA. But the Fellowship of NA has taken my recovery to totally another level. I have struggled with many issues of self-esteem, abandonment, neglect, low self-worth, and many other very serious emotional issues. But all of that didn't matter the second I was hugged by the man who has volunteered his time to actually oversee our meeting. Wow!! How do I describe that?

I started to share, and it felt so good. I then was actually nominated to become the literature person and eventually was elected the secretary. Oh my god! What is happening here? The feelings of unconditional acceptance totally possessed my spirit, and I wholeheartedly become a trusted servant of our group. This experience was so new to me because all those other emotional issues and my sexual orientation have caused me to feel that I could never be part of something that was healthy and included me, J the person, not J the gay guy, the outcast, the loser.

Soon, I embraced the help, the support, and the message of NA. I sent a letter to NA World Services, and with the help of a superior officer, I inquired about sending our group some books. Well, the day the books arrived was like Christmas to me! Just look at the power of recovery, of helping each other, of reaching out to each other; it is just so powerful. Our group now has a dedicated recovery room and it is being filled with posters, some even sent by NA World Services. Yes, I made another request, and they answered. I have come to gain so much confidence, so much peace, so much self-esteem with myself that it does scare me, but I know that as long as I keep working my recovery, I will continue to become a stronger, more compassionate, more peaceful human being. And you know what? That's exactly what I want to be.

Thank you to NA World Services, thank you to all the guys at the Tuesday night group, and a very special thanks to our two volunteers for coming each week and being the captains of our vessel of recovery from port to port.

I have been truly blessed to have entered the halls of Narcotics Anonymous, and I will continue my recovery throughout the rest

of my life. I do plan on joining another group upon my release and becoming an active member of that group. Who truly knows where my journey of recovery will take me? I do know that I am grateful for your services and all that the NA program does provide throughout the world in spreading the passion of recovery, of hope, of living a good, peaceful, healthy life. Thank you, oh so much!!

Sincerely,

JS, Rhode Island.

Dear Reaching Out,

I am currently serving twelve months. They tried for house arrest but the judge revoked that. I was flabbergasted! I thought about how unfair my sentence was. Through NA and my Fourth Step I began to really look at my part in everything.

I used to laugh at the women who thanked God for being in jail. I learned through NA that I was lucky that I only got the twelve months; some people don't even have an out date.

While I am not happy to be here, I am using this time out to work on me. Prison has given me food, clothing, shelter, laundry service, work ethic, and job and school opportunities, to name just a few. I now realize that the world does not revolve around me. I do thank God for a better perspective on my situation. I choose to live an NA way of life. Thank you for putting the message of recovery and hope out for people like me.

JL, Louisiana

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is W, addict. I first want to say how grateful I am for Narcotics Anonymous and Reaching Out. I used meth for at least ten years, went in and out of jail for various things. Every time I was busted I would swear off drugs forever, until I got out. Finally I caught my first prison term. I did my time, this time paroling to a sober living house, which was my decision. I worked steps with my sponsor, got a job, got married, discharged parole. Things were great. I had all the warnings from my sponsor and friends in NA. I had almost six years clean, then one day I decided that I missed the lifestyle so I started hanging out in the wrong spots. (I remember hearing that if you hang out in the barber shop long enough, you

are going to get a haircut.) I picked up and started losing everything from that moment on. A few times I thought it was rock bottom, and I swore as soon as I got high one more time I would sign myself in someplace to get help. Talk about insanity. My higher power, God, the way I see it, had had enough watching me suffer and hurting everyone who cared about me.

Right this very minute I am writing you all from a county jail, awaiting the chain for another prison term. I pray that there will be an NA meeting to attend wherever I end up. If not, I have promised myself that on the day of my parole about two and a half years from now, as soon as I report to my PO, the very next place I'll go will be a meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, with the hopes of once again becoming a clean, productive member of NA and society. That's right, no more hopeless dope fiend; instead I'll be a dopeless hope fiend. I thank you for giving me hope and encouragement, and I am grateful to Reaching Out for the letters and correspondence. Thank you, and keep up the great work.

Sincerely,
W, California

Dear Reaching Out,

Growing up I was subjected to physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. I began using drugs at a very young age in order to kill my pain and the shame of the abuse. Soon there seemed to never be enough drugs to get the job done. My anger, resentment, and unpredictability rose to explosive levels. I hurt, so you were gonna hurt.

I've been through three rehabilitation programs. The last one opened the door to my recovery. Unfortunately, I didn't listen and broke a golden rule. I sought out a relationship in my first year of recovery. Soon I was caught up in addiction and running with the same people. I was back to not caring about life, death, you, or myself. I tried for suicide by cop. I got shot five times with shotgun-fired bean bags.

It seems my Higher Power had to bring me here in order to get my attention. After years of trying, he has finally succeeded. There is a Higher Power in my life now. I accept the principles of NA coupled with my Higher Power. I finally realize that I don't understand all the principles of NA; I just need to follow them. So the healing has

begun. I sometimes lie in my cell, think about the wreckage of my life, and cry.

There is no way for me to repair the damage I've done to others and myself, but I'm willing to make amends. I have time to make a difference in my life and others', too, as long as I follow the NA way. Maybe I can help save a few souls by sharing my experience, strength, and hope. I can carry the message. I can help others and feel good about myself. I still have a lot of painful memories, but I no longer use drugs. I have NA, my Higher Power, and my friends in NA.

R, Oregon

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear Reaching Out,

I am a recovering addict named C. At thirty-four years old, I realize that this disease is a lifelong process and that it never goes away. Looking back, I wish I would have conformed in jail and made the best of my time there. Instead I rebelled, thumbed my nose at the system, and thought I had all the answers. This was in 1995-1996 during my nine-month probation violation in county jail. I had never gone to prison, and the other inmates told me there was a difference between jail and state prison. These inmates helped me get through hard times, especially J who told me that they have to open the door sooner or later. C helped me before sentencing, when I was in county jail for the first time. He told me to pray and be honest and tell my higher power I was sorry. I communicated with my higher power that night in tears, and repented. I received fifty-one days time served to five years probation instead of the maximum forty-six-year sentence.

What I did was dumb. Had I listened, I would not have been on probation again in 1999 when I committed another crime to support my drug habit. I received five years' probation for this offense and walked it off due to other addicts in NA. You see, I accumulated six and a half years clean from 13 June 1999 to 15 September 2005. I stayed clean with your help. I suffered a serious relapse in September of 2005 and caught a new case. Luckily I beat the case, but I was guilty of a relapse. I used off and on for two years, each time hitting a new bottom. I realize now that this disease does not discriminate and does not care if you have six and a half years clean.

I have that today, and I am grateful for it. I do not worry about the future anymore or if I am going to relapse, because that type of thinking took me out. My sponsor and my support group help me, as do the incarcerated NA addicts with their stories. I thank you so much, as you are a gold mine of experience, strength, and hope for me. I am forever indebted to you. I am writing because not many of you hear from people on the outside. I know how lonely it is in there, how I used to think people on the outside didn't care. I had

no visitors for nine solid months and was placed in solitary confinement for some of the time.

Today I have no open cases, I am not on probation, and I thank God and all the people in NA. The only thing I can do to pay you back is not use for this moment, this hour, and this day. I am grateful for my sixty-three days clean. It means more to me than the six and a half years I lost. My sponsor helps me, and I go to NA meetings. When I get ninety days, God willing, I would love to speak at a meeting or chair it. When I get a year clean, God willing, I would love to come into a facility and share what people have given me, a new way of life.

Just for today, I never have to use again. I can lose the desire to use and find a new way of life. Just for today I have money in my pocket and I choose not to cop today. All of you children of God who are incarcerated and who choose not to cop in the facility, you give me hope. We all know an addict can get drugs anywhere, including jail. If I can do anything, including write or visit, I will. Just for today, my thoughts are on my recovery and I have a new way of life. Thank you for helping a mother get back her son.

Forever indebted to the people
behind the walls in NA,
CC

Dear Reaching Out,

I'm an addict and my name is J. I'm filled with gratitude and shivers while I'm writing this story. I have been involved with H&I for over eleven years now.

I recall when at the beginning of my commitment I was introduced to the incarcerated environment. I was going to the prison once a month to see the guys and talk to them and share my strength and hope with them. One of them had two life terms with no possibility of parole. He was to spend the rest of his life in prison, and all during that time I was trying to instill some hope in this man's heart, telling him to pray, do whatever he could to keep busy, and work his program to the best of his ability. I told him to always keep some hope; you never know what can happen.

I changed jobs and I could no longer go the meeting because of my schedule, and later that meeting closed down due to lack of

involvement and support. Often I would wonder what that inmate might be up to, hoping that he would remember some of the discussions we had and put into practice some tools that the meeting had brought to him.

One day out of the blue I received a phone call from J, the coordinator at one of our facilities, telling me that he wanted me to come and share at the center he was involved in. I hesitated a bit, and he told me that he would really appreciate it and that he had a surprise for me at the meeting. So he got me curious, and I decided to go and share. I arrived at the meeting and J and I sat with the inmates, having coffee before we got started. The door opened and one guy came in. My back was turned, so I didn't see him, but as soon as I heard his voice I knew the voice. I turned around to look, and there he was, the inmate from the prison I used to do H&I service work at, and he proceeded to tell me that he was married and getting out within one year. He thanked me for all the strength and hope that I had shared with him during those times I was serving that prison. Just to see him there in a minimum facility, ready to be released and to regain his liberty, was one of the greatest gifts of my recovery.

I still do service in H&I. You wonder why? I won't get high while doing H&I!

With gratitude
JD, Montreal

Dear Reaching Out,

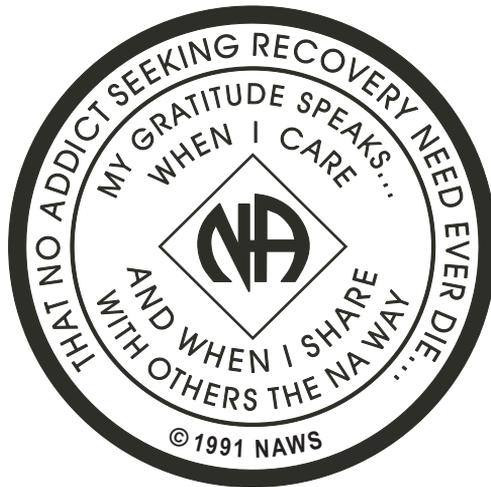
I'm an addict named G, and I'm grateful for every experience I've had since I've gotten clean. My very first H&I commitment was in 1993. I brought a meeting into a locked unit in a local hospital in New York. The patients had mental health issues that were the primary diagnosis for admittance onto this unit. Back then the term was MICA: Mentally Impaired Chemically Addicted. That has since changed to a more politically correct phraseology: co-occurring disorders. As many know where I come from, the street terminology was "flight deck," and it was a term I also used to describe the places where people went when they were "crazy" and had a "meltdown."

I began to shift my own prejudices while doing this commitment. It set the stage for one of the dearest friendships I've been blessed with to date. I have a friend, J, who got the NA message from the

members I had brought into that facility to speak. He paid close attention, internalized the suggestions, such as getting to a meeting the day he was released from the unit. And he did, and that is where his journey of recovery began. We became fast friends and he became an integral member of my support group. J was actually fundamental in stopping me from ending up on a “flight deck” when my wife passed away with cancer in 2004. His love and support helped me maintain the limited sanity I’ve accumulated since getting clean, and I shudder to think about how gypped all of us who have come to love him would have been if he hadn’t heard our message through H&I.

Some studies suggest that more than half of people seeking treatment have co-occurring issues, and many of them end up in our fellowship. I work in the field, and I’ve learned that we need to heighten our awareness and become more tolerant of our members who suffer with more acute issues, especially when it comes to taking medications to help address these issues. I too suffer from MH issues, and received some heavy diagnoses while in prison. Thank you for allowing me to share.

In loving service,
GW, New York



“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.”

SUBSCRIPTION 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 twenty-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$31.00, 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 _____twenty-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$31.00 each, total \$ _____.

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