

Reaching Out

July 2017



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*“Although **our minds** told us that we would **never make it**, the **people** in the Fellowship **gave us hope** by insisting that **we could recover.**”*

Basic Text, “Why Are We Here?”

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 three 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 Hospitals & Institutions 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.

The third and newest section, "Transitioning from the Inside to the Outside," features members sharing about successfully transitioning from treatment, a hospital, or an institution to living 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*; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to fsmail@na.org.

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

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
October 2017	15 July 2017
January 2018	15 October 2017
April 2018	15 January 2018

And finally, did you know that electronic subscriptions to *Reaching Out* are free? New issues will be emailed to you four times a year.

To sign up, visit www.na.org/reachingout.



From the Inside

Dear Reaching Out,

When I was a child, I used to go to meetings with my mom. I had at least 20 keytags under my belt by the time I was ten years old. I would watch from the back of the room as people received keytags and took cakes; my favorite part was at the end when the members would say, “Keep coming back, it works if you work it!” I really did not have any idea what it all meant at the time.

I am 39 years old today. Only recently, as I have stepped out of the program’s shadow—where I have lived most of my life—and into its light, do I exactly understand what it all meant. That understanding has come with freedom, forgiveness, love, and clarity on a level I simply can’t capture with words. My road to recovery has been a long and treacherous one, paved with unspeakable pain that I have inflicted upon others and myself. I always held the belief that whether I used or not was a question of willpower. So when I told myself that I was going to quit at the end of the week, it turned into the end of the month, and then to the end of the year, and the cycle went on for years.

I developed the hopelessness that I was cursed to live and die as a dope fiend. Within that warped reality, I fought and lost countless battles with drugs as I devolved physically, spiritually, and emotionally into something I no longer recognized. Rock bottom is a picnic compared to where I found myself a few years back, when my greatest fear—the death of my grandma—became reality. The more drugs I poured on top of my pain, the worse it got. Finally, my anguish gave way to a belief, which was then still just an intuition, that there had to be something better. As it turns out there was, even for someone like me. I have been in prison now for 22 years. I came in at 17 years old, but for the first time in my life I am free from the prison of addiction. It is nothing short of a miracle, one that has opened me up to so much hope for today and for tomorrow, a daily miracle that reintroduces me to the beautiful bright side of life after decades of darkness.

I have learned forgiveness and how to make a living amends. I have surrendered my life to God. My relationships with my family and friends are rooted in love. I am enrolled in college and self-help courses, and I am blessed to be part of a program that allows me to mentor youth. At last I have a purpose in life. I awake daily and strive to be worthy and earn my place back in society. Are things perfect? Not even close. But the reality is that, with my God and my NA family, I can ride out all of life's storms.

BJ, CA

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is J and I am an addict. I am 45 years old and have been using since I was eleven years old off and on. In July 2000, I was introduced to the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. Narcotics Anonymous has changed my life. I can really identify with all of the people I have met along the way in the rooms.

I have been in and out, with five years being the longest time I was able to stay clean. For an addict like me, that itself was a miracle. The people and the program were slowly showing me how to live a responsible and productive life without the use of drugs. Unfortunately, I stopped doing the things that were keeping me clean: working the Steps and going to meetings. It didn't take long for me to lose everything that I had worked so hard for. Again I was lost. The blessing is that I have my life and I am not dead.

I have been through a lot, and I am determined to get my life back. Narcotics Anonymous is the only thing I have found that works for me and keeps me clean. I want all the things that the program has to offer. To me, Narcotics Anonymous is the only recovery. I am incarcerated in a correctional facility in Illinois. I have ten months left in here.

This is a recovery prison, but their focus is on behavior modification. They do have one meeting a week here. I thank my higher power for the NA program. It has saved my life before, and I am hoping—no, wait, I am knowing — it can again. My goal is to find a sponsor and work the program the way it is

supposed to be done: one day at a time. I have faith that with help from people like you and the program, I will get my life back. I have got to start from the bottom again, but faith has me drawn to succeed this time.

J, IL

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is CG and I am an addict. I am currently incarcerated in a correctional facility in Indiana. I am doing a four-year sentence, and I am currently in the Share Program. I grew up with a father who was an alcoholic and who abused me as well. I was mentally, physically, and emotionally abused on a regular basis. All I knew and saw while growing up was violence. That continued with me after I went out on my own.

I got into drinking and using at the age of 15. It soon progressed until I was 25. I went to prison for the first time at the age of 18 and was still in high school. After getting out, I went straight back to using and drinking. I ended up getting a girl pregnant with my first child, and she left me because of my history. I began to use and drink more and proceeded to get into more trouble with the law. I was in and out several times.

I never thought I had a problem until now. After hearing people share in meetings, I realized that I did. I attend several meetings a week and continue to listen to others share, and I find myself asking and answering the question that I am definitely an addict. I was at first not a believer; now I am a firm believer. I never thought that my life could feel this good.

Those who have shared their thoughts and stories have been a true inspiration to me. Who would have thought that others sharing could help me fix my own problems just by listening? I am now five years without a drink or pill. I owe everything to the people and program around me. I urge all of those who think they don't have a problem with drinking or using to give NA a fair chance. My wife of 18 years is still by my side because I am

making a change for the good. Thank you for my Higher Power and the people for NA.

CG, IN

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is SR and I am a grateful recovering addict. I am writing to share how the spiritual principles and Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous have brought new meaning into my life. As a kid, I was fascinated by the forbidden. I thought I could do whatever I wanted as long as my parents or those with authority didn't find out. What I wanted was to get high. What I got was three concurrent life sentences and 21 years of running wild.

I am 66 years old now and have been in prison for 39 years. I reunited with my family 18 years ago after transferring to my home state. I learned that I was a grandfather and decided it was time to change and grow up. I stopped using and started taking college classes, but abstinence isn't the same as recovery. I hadn't really changed. I still obsessed about everything; resentment, anger, and fear ruled my life. I was miserable.

I took my first step toward recovery four years ago. I knew there was an NA meeting at this facility but resisted attending because I thought it was a religious group. I don't believe in a supernatural deity and did not want to be preached to. Nevertheless, I know that if I am ever released, I will need help staying clean. I have never been able to do it on my own, so I signed up for the NA meeting.

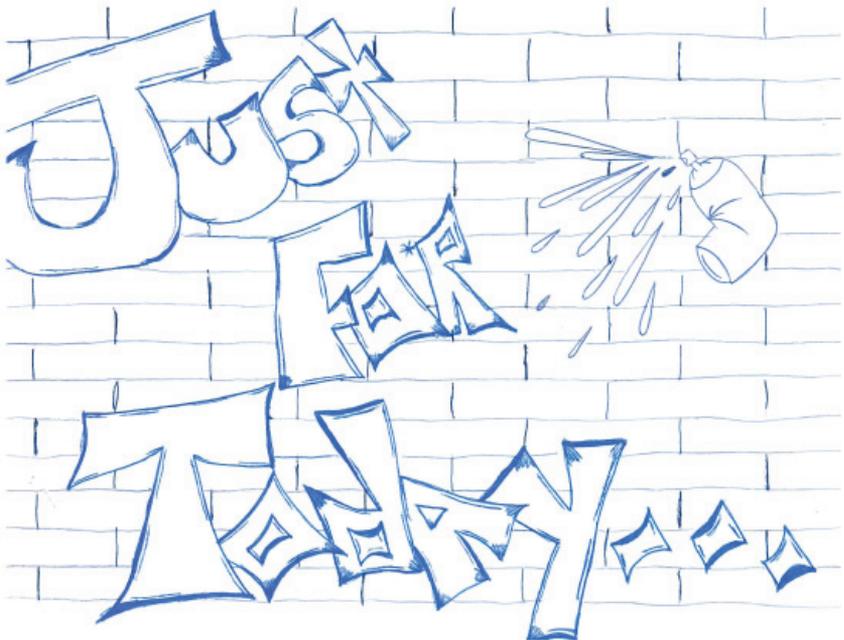
The H&I volunteers welcomed me with open arms and a hug. The readings explained that NA is a spiritual, not religious, program. I was told that an attitude of indifference toward spiritual principles is the one thing that could impede my recovery, and that honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are indispensable. I knew I needed to know more about spiritual principles, so I picked up a handful of informational pamphlets and spent the next several days reading about principles like

surrender, humility, tolerance, goodwill, and creative freedom and how these principles are embodied in the Twelve Steps.

Our H&I meeting is a *Just for Today* topic discussion. I always try to participate in the discussions and ask questions. One day someone told me that all of my questions could be found in the Basic Text. I wrote to NA World Services and they sent me a new edition of the Basic Text. The book explained so much to me when I read about self-obsession being the core of my disease. It was like a light came on, and I suddenly saw how all the chaos and destruction in my life had stemmed directly from my attitude of self-centeredness.

The main message I have gotten at meetings and from literature is that recovery comes from working the Steps, and it is a process you should do with a sponsor. I have learned more about myself in the past four years than I have in my first 62 years. I will continue to grow emotionally and spiritually in my recovery. I am grateful for this Fellowship.

SR, CT



JG, MN

ART FROM THE ZSIDE

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 jpegs or pdf files to Handl@na.org, or mail to Reaching Out; c/o NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409.

FREE FROM ADDICTIONS



TF, PA



From the Outside

Dear Reaching Out,

Hello, my name is RT and I am an addict. In 2005 I was serving a life sentence in a state penitentiary. I was 25 years in and three weeks from being considered for parole for the eleventh time when I was sent to the hole for a dirty urine test. I was convicted of a drug-related homicide and still shooting dope after 25 years. I was a lost soul and couldn't find my way out of the darkness of my disease. I began to think that suicide was my only way out.

I have a friend who was an addict like me who changed his life around inside the penitentiary. He invited me to a meeting for my first time and told me about the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. He also told me that I never have to use again. I immersed myself in the NA program and began working the Twelve Steps. I became of service, and the miracle of recovery blossomed in my life.

Hopelessness had been replaced by hope in my life, and I was granted parole after four years in the NA program. The group meetings of Narcotics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps gave me the tools to learn how to live a new way of life, and for that I am forever grateful. Today I am off parole and living my life as an example of change in the free community. I have been out of prison for five years now and use the tools that I have learned through the Twelve Steps to guide me in all aspects of life in my daily recovery. Recovery for me doesn't end in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous; today I get to recover in all areas of my life. In my personal relationships, working relationships, and being of service in my community, the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous have helped me to become a better human being, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Miracles happen in the penitentiary where I got clean. There is a revolution taking place there, and that is the group that saved my life.

RT, OR

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is LG and I am an addict. My clean date is 6 March 2007. Right now I am taking a break from work to write this letter. I am working at the same treatment center where I got clean. I love being clean and I love Narcotics Anonymous. As far back as I can remember I was always a frightened, insecure, obsessive, and compulsive person. Drugs had taken over my entire life, and I could not stand the feelings of uselessness, emptiness, and complete and utter despair that I lived with.

The first day of my release from treatment I went to at least two meetings a day and continued that for my first 90 days. I remember feeling so lost, desperate, and afraid. I didn't want to use anymore because I was convinced I would die if I went back to using again. I always had a tendency to go after everything in my life with everything I had.

It wasn't until I asked someone to be my sponsor and read the literature with him and worked the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts that I really experienced the gift of recovery and the miracle in my life. Before I did that, I had lost everything I had pursued. I am thankful for Narcotics Anonymous coming into the treatment center. Those members who were committed to telling newcomers about NA led me to be convinced that the most important thing I needed to do was get connected to the NA program and the people living it.

I am grateful for my sponsor and I love my sponsor. Through sponsorship I have experienced a relationship like no other that has taught me so much about being effective in every relationship in my life. That daily support has been so vital to my process. I have been through job losses, injuries, getting an education, the birth of my son and raising him as a single father, divorce, relapse of those I love, and patient struggles in reaching for a better life. I have come so far from where I was, and sometimes feel as though I am in a desert. Today I have bigger hopes and dreams. The NA program has taught me that I can find happiness again.

LG, IN

Dear Reaching Out,

When I was 19 years old I decided that I was sick of being the outcast, the loser, the “nobody.” I wanted to be the person everyone wanted to hang out with, and then I discovered drugs. I started using, and suddenly people liked me and wanted to be around me. I loved this feeling and became intoxicated by it. I decided I wanted more. That’s when I started using harder drugs. I thought I had it all because I had people who wanted to be around me. However, the only reason they wanted to be around me was because I had a supply and they wanted it. I was used for my money.

Once I lost my job, I lost that supply and no one wanted to be around me anymore. I went into a deep depression and wanted to die. Then I decided to get more drugs, so I needed to rob and manipulate people. Eventually I went to jail for my actions. I spent 30 days in jail and found God, and realized I needed help. I decided to go to rehab; I was bonded out of jail and taken to a treatment center. I was on a 30-day restriction where I couldn’t leave the property, but after that 30 days was over I started attending NA meetings.

I found an NA group, and when I walked up to the meeting I was scared because I thought people wouldn’t like me. Once I walked through the door, however, I was greeted with smiles and hugs and told, “Welcome, you never have to use again.” I felt like people were just saying that I never had to use again. I had told myself that once I got off probation I would return to those people, places, and things because that’s where I felt at home. I had reservations and couldn’t wait to get off probation.

I continued to go to the rooms of NA, though, and realized they are right! I never have to use again. It’s my choice, not anyone else’s. I thought of all the pain drugs caused me and asked myself, “Is it worth putting myself through all that again?” The answer is no. None of us should ever put ourselves through the pain that is addiction. There is always help, and I thank God every day that I found it in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. This program and the Fellowship absolutely changed my life and it can change yours too, but only if you allow it. Living the dream.

CM, IL

Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented H&I T-shirts. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act and art. Please share your H&I T-shirt pictures with us! We would like to showcase your art. HandI@na.org

ART FROM THE H&I SIDE

H&I T-Shirts



Tanzania H&I

New York City
H&I





Transitioning from the Inside to the Outside

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is AK and I am an addict. After serving my time, I was paroled to a correctional halfway house. With my release I did what many addicts do with their “gate” money — rewarded myself with getting high. That initial high was the beginning of the end of my using lifestyle. I continued with that behavior of using for a couple of weeks; however, I was beginning to go overboard. My last high began innocently and proceeded to crimes throughout the night, which nearly cost me my life. I recall looking up to the sky and thinking that I hadn’t lived through everything I did to die on the streets.

Needless to say, with my return to the halfway house, I knew I had violated every rule and most likely would be returned to prison to complete my sentence. However, my HP saw things differently for me. I was given the option of going to NA rather than be returned to prison. I took the NA meeting option, which seemed like the lesser of two evils.

I will not say it was love in the beginning with NA meetings; I actually thought the state was playing another game on me. Yet I kept going to NA meetings, solely because I didn’t want to return to prison. After about a month, my head began to clear and I was able to listen. I recall that NA members said that I needed a sponsor, a home group, and to work the Steps as NA was a program of change. Seemed overwhelming to me. To be a “good” NA member, I decided to make a Step meeting my home group.

Through the process of early recovery from the halfway house, I had glimpses that recovery was an inside job. To help me be less self-centered, I was informed by my sponsor, I needed to be of service in NA, and in my first 60 days I became a secretary for an area. Actually and more accurately, I was coerced into that commitment. I did stick with the commitment and found that

my reward was self-worth and self-esteem—I had something to offer, whereas I had previously felt like the dregs of society.

After four months at the halfway house, I was paroled to society and continued my recovery. With over three decades clean, I find that what I learned as I started my recovery and transitioned still holds true. I maintain regular NA meeting attendance, continue to have a sponsor and continue to work the Steps, and remain of service to the Fellowship that saved my life and gave me a life worth living.

AK, CA

INSIDE OUT



Whether you left from a treatment center, jail, prison, hospital, or institution, you are moved from the “inside” to the “outside” to be drug-free, productive members of society. We think your experience may be invaluable to others as they embark upon their transition.

We are offering questions to help stimulate your thinking so that you may want to share your experience with us; we will publish your article in *Reaching Out* to help others.

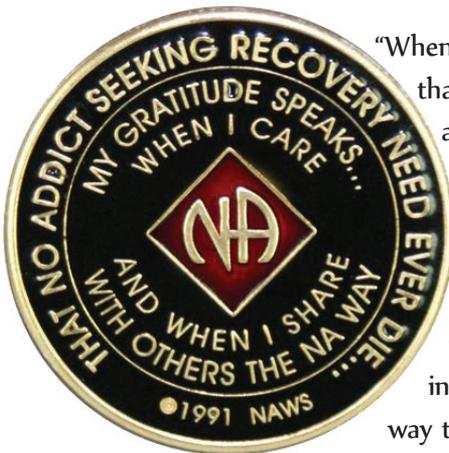
1. What did you do on the first day of your release/discharge?
2. What steps did you take to help your recovery in the community? Do you think the transition steps are the same for addicts who are being released after 30 days or ten years?
3. What are some of the challenges you encountered when you reentered the community?
4. How did NA help you with information so that you were able to attend a meeting upon release/discharge?
5. How do you think NA may have been better able to help you in your transition, and do you have any suggestions to offer so NA may be better able to help others as they transition?

We look forward to reading your experience and providing this information to others. Thank you for helping us assist others in their transition.

CALLING ALL H&I MEMBERS!

Please submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We are looking for recovering addicts, like you, to share their experience of finding recovery behind the walls and maintaining it on the outside. Your story carries a powerful message of hope for the incarcerated addict! Thank you.

Please send your story to:
Narcotics Anonymous World Services;
PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409,
or to HandI@na.org.



“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 \$35.90 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* @ \$35.90 each, total \$ _____.

Name _____

Identification Number _____

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State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Country _____

Reaching Out

c/o NA World Services, Inc. ☉ PO Box 9999 ☉ Van Nuys, CA 91409 ☉ USA

www.na.org/reachingout

ATTENTION INMATES

If you are relocating and your mailing address changes while you are incarcerated, please update your new address with us so that we can maintain your subscription to *Reaching Out*.