



#34 Group Conscience and NA Literature

November 2020

From the World Board

The following report from the Board was written in 2015, in response to illicit printing of NA literature. In 2020, we have decided to make this report and the related report from 2014, *NA Copyrights and Literature*, official World Board Bulletins. We left the following report as it was written but updated the NA World Services statistics for the 2018–2019 fiscal year.

We find ourselves again in a situation where some members are acting contrary to the will of the Fellowship regarding the publishing, distribution, and protection of NA literature. The conscience of the NA Fellowship is, and has been, clear that NA literature belongs to the Fellowship as a whole and that World Services holds that literature, NA's "intellectual property," in trust for the Fellowship.

The legal agreement describing this relationship is called the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust (FIPT)*. NA World Services (NAWS) is the Trustee of the *FIPT*. Our role is to safeguard NA's literature and intellectual property for the NA Fellowship. In 2020 a legal action was brought against NA World Services wanting to remove NAWS as the Trustee of the *FIPT*. In addition to the disunity this caused, it diverted a significant portion of our budget for legal fees, making those resources unavailable to further our primary purpose. The people bringing the case claimed to be representing a region, but we are not aware that such a region exists. The court found in World Services' favor and agreed that the people bringing the suit did not have the legal standing to do so.

In this respect, the law and the principles of NA agree—a group of individuals cannot act on behalf of NA as whole.

There are many ways individuals can have their voices heard in NA. They can bring their concerns to their groups. Many areas and regions have open forums where members can share ideas. Members can write to the World Board with any questions or concerns. As far as we know, none of these avenues was attempted. This group of individuals did not reach out to the Board before taking legal action.

Decisions in NA are made by group conscience, and the vehicle to hear group conscience on a world level is the World Service Conference (WSC). The WSC is the means by which "NA groups have a mechanism to guide and direct the activities of NA World Services" (WSC Mission Statement).

No matter how convinced a group of individual members may be that their cause is legitimate, "we can only be governed by a loving God as expressed in our group conscience." (*Narcotics Anonymous*, Tradition Two). The individuals who brought the legal action were seeking to cancel the WSC decisions through a legal court. That is not how we make decisions in NA. We have paths to follow for issues that the fellowship wants to discuss. When those paths tell you no, guided by our Second Tradition, the answer is not to try to go outside of NA to change that outcome.

We are unified as a Board in our commitment to the Fellowship's conscience.

It's extraordinary for an addict to get clean. In NA, we not only get clean but recover together in unity, carry a message, and fulfill service obligations. Tradition Two tells us this is possible because we are united under an ultimate authority. This Tradition frees us as members from the dangerous belief that we are in charge, or that some of us are more important than others. Seeing this Tradition at work in our groups offers a vision of hope. As we apply Tradition Two in our service—and in our lives—we begin to understand the power and grace available to us in surrender.

Group Conscience & NA Literature

In 1991 the World Service Conference passed two motions—one to reaffirm that the WSO holds ownership of NA’s intellectual property in trust for the Fellowship of NA, and another to reaffirm that the WSO is exclusive publisher and distributor of all NA literature.

At the time, WSO’s intellectual property attorney explained to the Conference:

“This needs to be done for the benefit of those people who do not have the time, energy, or the interest to look back at what really happened and would rather argue that the past consists of what they believe should have happened.”

And here we are again—increasing numbers of our members are illegally copying and distributing NA literature around the world, sowing seeds of confusion and disunity, including places where NA is in early stages. In particular, people are publishing a booklet that contains the Third Edition Revised Basic Text with the Second Edition versions of the Fourth and Ninth Traditions, a booklet that was compiled by a few individuals and has **never been Fellowship-approved**. It is bad enough that we have had this ongoing struggle within NA; now it has become a public problem because these texts are being distributed in institutions.

The roots of this conflict go back more than 30 years. The history of the Basic Text is a story that gets told many ways, with different heroes and villains depending on who is doing the telling.

There are some things, however, that are not open to interpretation:

- 1. It goes against group conscience.** The fellowship has decided on these issues repeatedly,
 - beginning in 1984 when the fellowship voted to return to the First Edition language for the Fourth and Ninth Traditions,
 - and again in 1988 when the conference rejected the idea of extensive changes to the text beyond fixing the errors in the Fourth Editions,
 - and again in 1991 when the conference voted against reconsidering which edition of the book should be published,
 - and again in 1993 when the fellowship approved the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust*,
 - and again as recently as 2004 when a *CAR* motion was passed authorizing revisions to the Basic Text but specifying no changes be made to chapters one through ten of the text. That 2004 motion resulted in the Sixth Edition Basic Text, which was approved unanimously in 2008.
- 2. It’s illegal.** The unauthorized reproduction of NA literature is a violation of copyright law. NA groups can copy and distribute NA literature for use within their groups, but that right does not extend outside the group or to individuals and service bodies.
- 3. It doesn’t make sense.** On top of everything else, the portions of the Fourth and Ninth Traditions reinserted into the text of the booklets that are being distributed don’t reflect most members’ understanding of NA service. The Fourth Tradition essay says of service committees, offices, and activities, “these things are not N.A.” The Ninth Tradition essay says that service boards or committees “are not a part of Narcotics Anonymous.” That doesn’t even make sense, does it? Are the funds from your area dance an outside donation? Is your local H&I committee somehow not a part of NA?



We are writing this on behalf of NA World Services, and we consider ourselves a grateful part of NA. NAWS provides support and services to addicts, meetings, and service bodies in 132 countries, speaking 77 languages. We interact with professionals and officials who influence the lives of addicts around the world to make our message more available. Here are just a few figures to give you a sense of our work. In the 2018–2019 fiscal year, we

- ◀ gave away and discounted an unprecedented \$832,315 worth of literature;
- ◀ answered more than 5,500 inmate inquiries with an information packet and NA literature;
- ◀ sent out 418 group starter kits and more than 22 institutional group starter kits;
- ◀ held 17 PR and H&I web meetings
- ◀ published 49 new pieces of translated literature, bringing us to 1,142 translated titles for NA recovery literature; and
- ◀ participated in 34 fellowship development and zonal events.

The money to pay for those services comes mostly from literature sales. In essence, when you buy a Basic Text, you are helping to pay for the literature we give away around the world and all of our other efforts.

Despite that fact, some people will tell you that the Basic Text is too expensive and that is why they are illegally distributing an unapproved version. But again, the fellowship’s conscience is clear: The motion to produce a lower-cost Basic Text has been before the conference at least nine times; it’s been committed once, ruled out of order twice, and defeated at least six times.

In the end, this isn’t about politics or personal views; this is about the spiritual principles of group conscience and NA unity. Please respect the will of the fellowship. Illicit literature has no place in our meetings. For more information about NA’s copyrights and world services’ responsibility to protect them, see www.na.org/fipt.



2020 Basic Text Timeline