



# #35 Narcotics Anonymous Copyrights and Literature

November 2020

This essay is being distributed in response to illicit publication and distribution of the Basic Text. As many of you know, this is not a new issue, but recently this activity has increased along with extensive outreach campaigns to members to join forces, obtain free or low cost literature, and distribute it. Some have even challenged World Services to take legal action, using Fellowship funds to do so. We do not want to have to resolve this matter in court, and we believe most of the Fellowship does not want that either. This has become a politicized matter to a great extent, but what's most important to us, as a fellowship, isn't about politics or even the law; it's about spiritual principles.

We are certainly not strangers to the idea that some members of our fellowship are critical of World Services. However, there is no justifiable reason for the illicit production and distribution of NA literature; it is just wrong, and frankly, it's contrary to the clearly expressed group conscience of the fellowship and principle of unity expressed in our First Tradition. We owe our lives to the message of recovery and hope contained in our literature and the current controversy must not ever be permitted to threaten the integrity of that message.

The fact is, the approval of the Sixth Edition Basic Text at the 2008 World Service Conference was a unanimous expression of consensus. The vote was followed by "hugs, tears, and a standing ovation" (WSC 2008 minutes). The Sixth Edition is the only approved edition of the Basic Text in English.

Part of our job at World Services is to protect the fellowship's property on its behalf. We would prefer to never have to write an essay such as this, but we are simply trying to fulfill our responsibilities and honor the trust that was placed in us as members of the World Board. Our duty is clearly outlined in *A Guide to World Services in NA*, the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust*, and our bylaws. These policies are the result of much controversy and pain in the late 1980s and early 90s, long before any of us served in our current positions. The issues were taken up in numerous *Conference Agenda Reports*, discussions at World Service Conferences, and even a lawsuit against a member. That painful process culminated with representatives of all parties involved sitting down and hammering out an agreement to pose the issues in dispute to the fellowship in the Conference Agenda Report and let group conscience decide. The fellowship overwhelmingly voiced its conscience on these matters at WSC 1991, passing several motions including one "To reaffirm and ratify that the ownership of all of NA's intellectual and physical properties prepared in the past, and to be prepared into the future, is held by WSO, Inc., which holds such title in trust on behalf of the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous as a whole, in accordance with the decisions of the World Service Conference" (67 yes, 9 no, 3 abstaining).

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### 1991 WSC Motion passed by 2/3 voice vote:

To reaffirm that the World Service Office, Inc. is the exclusive publisher and distributor of all World Service Conference-approved literature, including all books, pamphlets, handbooks, and other intellectual and physical properties, as directed by the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous through the World Service Conference.

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This led to the fellowship's adoption of the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust (FIPT)* in 1993. The purpose of the FIPT is to "hold and administer all recovery literature and other intellectual properties of the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous in a manner that will help addicts find recovery from the disease of addiction and carry that message of recovery to the addict who still suffers, in keeping with the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of NA" (*FIPT*).

The recent publication and distribution of the Basic Text by members not authorized by World Services seems to ignore all of these fellowship decisions. This is about protecting the future of Narcotics Anonymous so that the message, as expressed in our literature, is available to the addict who hasn't found us yet. If you are a trusted servant, you may have been asked questions about illicit NA literature or you may have questions yourself. Here are a few of the more common things people ask about.

### **Why is it so important to protect our copyrights?**

This is first and foremost about the integrity of the NA message and the need to protect NA's property so that NA can continue to own its own material. We have a duty to ensure that Narcotics Anonymous literature contains text agreed upon by the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. Protecting our copyrights is the only way to guarantee the conceptual fidelity of NA literature and to safeguard the property of the NA Fellowship.

### **Why can't we have free literature or a low-cost Basic Text?**

The conference has repeatedly entertained and soundly defeated motions to create a low-cost Basic Text. This is fundamentally an issue of economics. Most of World Services' income comes from profit on the sales of literature, and we give away or subsidize more than a half million dollars' worth of literature each year. The money you don't spend on literature impacts our ability to respond to requests for literature from addicts across the globe. We are not a normal business; we are a spiritual fellowship that has to manage a business. But in order to fulfill our mission—to work toward a future where “every addict in the world has a chance to hear the message in his or her own language and culture”—we need to remain financially stable and to protect the property of Narcotics Anonymous. Similarly, many regions and areas depend on the sales of literature to keep phonelines running, texts getting delivered to prisons, and so on.

At the same time, it is important that our message remains accessible to all addicts regardless of their financial situation. *An Introductory Guide to Narcotics Anonymous* is an inexpensive piece of literature that contains the basics of the NA program. The *Intro Guide* was created through Conference action as an alternative to a low-cost Basic Text.

### **What can I do about illicit publication of the Basic Text and other NA literature?**

The only people who can really protect the fellowship's property are NA members and groups. Only our members and groups can effectively enforce the decisions made by the fellowship and put a stop to illicit distribution of NA literature. We are asking you not to participate in this sort of activity and not to condone it. Please help us protect NA's property and take a stand against its illegal production.

Educate yourself and those around you. This memo has been motivated by the purposeful illicit production of NA literature, but there is also a great deal of unintended violation of the FIPT—a service body decides to copy IPs and sell them to groups, a member gets a .pdf of a text and shares it with sponsees; these actions are actually not in line with the Fellowship's decisions and copyright laws. If you are unsure of what is and isn't okay in terms of reproducing NA literature or trademarks, the bulletins related to the *FIPT* answer most any question you might have: [www.na.org/fipt](http://www.na.org/fipt).

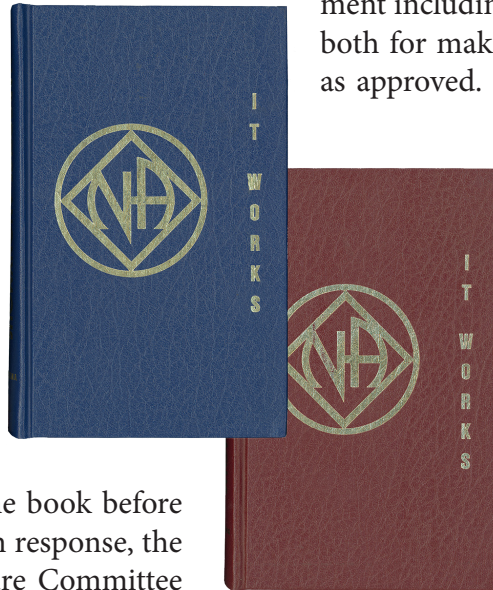
For those who want more background information, following is a brief factual history of the development of the Basic Text, the issues that arose as a result, and the decisions of the Fellowship at the World Service Conference.

## A Brief History of The Basic Text

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The World Service Conference of Narcotics Anonymous approved the Basic Text in May 1982. Having no experience in publishing a full-length book, publication of the First Edition was a very difficult job for the World Service Office. In addition to major problems with the printer initially chosen to publish the book, conceptual problems arose. In the course of preparing the approval-form book for publication, it was noted that portions of the essays on Traditions Four and Nine made it appear that the NA service structure should not be considered a part of Narcotics Anonymous. After much discussion, the WSO Board of Directors and the World Service Board of Trustees agreed that these portions should be removed from the book before publication of the First Edition. In response, the chairperson of the WSC Literature Committee attempted to revoke the earlier release to the WSO of rights to the Basic Text. However, when the World Service Conference met in May 1983, no motion was made to uphold the literature chairperson's action. On the contrary, new WSO by-laws were accepted, clearly stating that NA literature should be held in a charitable trust by the corporation on the fellowship's behalf. The WSO-copyrighted First Edition was officially released on 27 April 1983 by the World Service Office, using the name of CARENA Publishing Company.

Less than a month later, WSC action effectively created the Second Edition Basic Text. Conference minutes of 1983 reflect that a motion was passed, directing "that our book be completely returned to its [original] approved form in subsequent printings." The Second Edition of the Basic Text was released on 28 September 1983, with the missing lines reinserted. The year after the conference directed WSO to reinsert the missing lines from the traditions essays into the Basic Text, the WSC decided that the issue should ultimately be settled directly by the NA Fellowship. In 1984, regional



service representatives were asked to poll their groups on whether the wording of the essays on the Fourth and Ninth Traditions should be as reflected in both the original approval form and the Second Edition, or as reflected in the First Edition. The question was submitted to the fellowship in a seven-page document including the proposed changes and the reasons both for making the change and for keeping the text as approved. The fellowship's response was thirty-six votes in favor of changing the text and eight against changing the text. Therefore, at the next printing—the Third Edition—the words originally deleted from the approval-form when the First Edition was published were again deleted, this time in response to a direct vote of the fellowship. The Third Edition was formally released on 20 October 1984.

The 1985 World Service Conference passed a motion to edit the Basic Text for grammatical consistency and correctness. The motion called

for the revised text to be re-viewed and approved by the Literature Review Committee of the WSCLC. At the time, however, the Literature Committee was busy putting together *It Works: How and Why*, so these edits were not completed before the 1986 World Service Conference.

The 1986 conference, nonetheless, moved for further revisions to the Basic Text: A motion was passed to publish a revised version of the Little White Book and to edit the Basic Text to reflect those changes. The revisions to the Little White Book were ones that most members noticed because they changed what was read at most meetings. The Basic Text Third Edition, Revised was released in November 1986 and reflected the changes made in the Little White Book, but not the professional edit.

In the course of reviewing the draft of the professionally edited Basic Text, as charged by the conference, the Literature Review Committee discovered six conceptual inconsistencies with the newly revised Little White Book. The committee consulted with the WSO

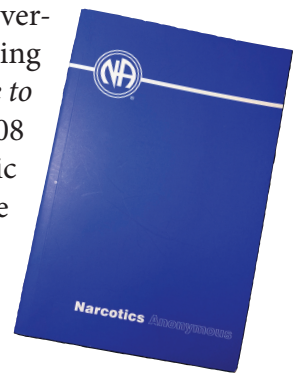
Board of Directors and the World Service Board of Trustees, and a decision was made to defer publication of the Fourth Edition until the conference was able to make a decision about the additional changes necessary to bring the text in line with the Little White Book. The 1987 WSC approved five of those six changes. The Fourth Edition Basic Text, published in October 1987, included these five changes, the earlier conceptual changes brought about by revising the Little White Book, as well as the professional edits. This was also the first version of the Basic Text to include a subject index, per 1986 WSC action.

Not long after the publication of the Fourth Edition, the WSO and the WSC Literature Committee began receiving complaints about errors in the Basic Text. After multiple rounds of line-by-line revision, it was discovered that there were serious transcription errors made in the typescript from which the professional editor worked. At the 1988 WSC, a motion was made to reinsert the missing lines from the Third Edition back into the Basic Text. Some felt that the changes in question were substantial enough to require broader fellowship review, but overall the conference did not agree and voted not even to consider the motion to send a special ballot to RSCs on the matter. Two other motions, very similar to one another, were defeated by overwhelming majorities; these motions sought to return to publication of the Third Edition, Revised, instead of printing a corrected Fourth Edition (i.e., Fifth Edition).

Despite the debate, the motion to reinsert the missing lines passed with significantly more than a 2/3 majority, and the Fifth Edition Basic Text was subsequently published later in 1988. Included in the motion was an amendment making the Basic Text “not eligible for revision for five years from this conference.” The 1993 World Service Conference extended the moratorium for another five years. In 1998 a similar motion for a moratorium failed, but the conference passed a motion to commit to the World Board all input, including motions and amendments, related to revising the Basic Text and Little White Book. The board was to present a proposal to the 2000 World Service Conference. At the 2000 conference, participants voted to begin a process of evaluating possible changes to the Basic Text and/or Little White Book. That process ultimately led to the project that created the Sixth Edition Basic Text.

At WSC 2008, three CAR motions creating the Sixth Edition Basic Text were unanimously adopted. These motions were (1) to replace the existing stories in the Fifth Edition Basic Text with those contained in the CAR; (2) add a new Preface to the Sixth Edition, change the title “Book One” and “Book Two” to “our Program” and “Our Members Share,” add abstracts of each story to the Table of Contents, approve the “Reflections” and the specific titles for the sections of the stories; and (3) give the World Board the ability to update statistical information (number of NA meetings, etc.) in the new preface. The rest of the decisions about the Sixth Edition were carried by substantial majority (over two-thirds) but were not unanimous. The additional motions approved were to include a revised index and make two specific copyedits to the first ten chapters. Those copyedits were to replace “N.A.” with “NA” and to remove a footnote in Tradition Eleven that referenced a PI guide that no longer exists.

This brought us to the current version of the text, and the following statement was added to *A Guide to World Services in NA*: “WSC 2008 approved the Sixth Edition Basic Text. Once it becomes available in October 2008, the Sixth Edition will be the only edition approved for NAWS production with the exceptions called out in the Translations Policy.”



## PROTECTING THE FELLOWSHIP'S INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The statement added to GWSNA about the Sixth Edition was explained in the *Conference Agenda Report* that year, and followed from a decision made at the 1991 conference about the Fifth. In 1990, some NA members took it upon themselves to print a version of the NA Basic Text, Book One, which they had created by combining the Third Edition, Revised, with the essays on Traditions Four and Nine from the Second Edition. In a US federal court hearing, the primary individual responsible for publishing the hybridized Basic Text at that time agreed to stop, and the World Service Office Board of Directors agreed to place three motions before the NA Fellowship in the 1991 *Conference Agenda Report*.

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## 1991 WSC

“That the fellowship reconsider its decision on which edition, or parts thereof (First, Second, Third, Third Revised, Fourth, or Fifth), of the Basic Text shall be produced and distributed by the WSO as the official and accepted text of Narcotics Anonymous.” (Motion failed by roll call vote 23-51-6)

“That the WSO produce, at a reduced price, the edition of the text ratified by the WSC. The actual price of this text should be determined in view of the following factors: its affordability to the membership at large; a change in the cost and quality of the materials used in producing the book; the responsibility of the WSO to provide services from the income generated by sales of the Basic Text; and whether it includes the personal stories or only the first ten chapters.” (Motion failed by voice vote)

“That the WSC be directed to obtain a group-by-group tally of all the groups registered with the WSO, on Motions 13 and 14 above. This procedure will begin on July 1, 1991 and continue through December 31, 1991. All the registered groups shall receive a copy of a paper detailing the differences between the editions of the Basic Text, and a complete copy of the Basic Text Third Edition, Revised. In addition, each group shall receive complete information concerning the issues relevant to a reduction in the price of the ratified text. [The motion includes one more paragraph detailing the committee to supervise the tally.]” (Motion failed by roll call vote 21-55-4.)

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All three motions were published in the *CAR*, were subsequently placed before the 1991 World Service Conference, and were defeated.

Following an extended discussion among all conference participants and the deliberations of an ad hoc committee, the WSC decided to issue the following statement to the fellowship:

“The Basic Text, Fifth Edition, is the only edition of the Basic Text that is currently approved by the World Service Conference of Narcotics Anonymous for publication and sale. The World Service Office Board of Directors is entrusted with the responsibility for protecting the fellowship’s physical and intellectual properties, including the Basic Text, and at the Board of Director’s discretion shall take legal action to protect those rights against any and all persons who choose to infringe upon this literature trust.”

Two related motions were also passed at WSC ’91 regarding NA intellectual property ownership and publishing. On a roll call vote with 67 yes votes, 9 no, and 3 abstaining, the following motion was carried: “To reaffirm and ratify that the ownership of all of NA’s intellectual and physical properties prepared in the past and to be prepared in the future is held by WSO, Inc., which holds such title in trust on behalf of the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous as a whole in accordance with the decisions of the World Service Conference.”

The other related motion was carried by a two-thirds majority voice vote: “To reaffirm that the World Service Office, Inc., is the exclusive publisher and distrib-

utor of all World Service Conference-approved literature, including all books, pamphlets, handbooks, and other intellectual and physical properties, as directed by the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous through the World Service Conference.”

Regarding the issue of a low-cost Basic Text, the 1991 WSC did recognize that an inexpensive book containing the basics of NA recovery would be a great product to have for newcomers at meetings. A motion that directed the WSO and WSC Literature Committee to compile and publish such a book, to be called *An Introductory Guide to Narcotics Anonymous*, passed by a unanimous voice vote.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the events recounted above, it seems quite clear that the NA Fellowship has expressed its conscience on the matter of its recovery literature. Any efforts by individuals or groups to reprint altered NA literature do not reflect the conscience of the NA Fellowship. The NA groups, as owners of NA’s copyrights, and NA World Services, as trustees in the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust*, are partners in the effort to protect NA’s copyrights. We are asking that you embrace this partnership and remember that NA groups and members have the right and the responsibility to demand that those who would reprint or modify NA literature refrain from doing so. Personal recovery depends on NA unity; we must work together to safeguard the integrity of our life-saving literature.