

# Reaching Out



Volume 23, Number 2

April 2008

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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!!**



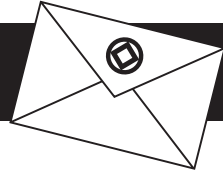
Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
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*,

Hello Family. As you continue to send me our newsletter, you continue to give me strength to battle this beast called addiction. God rescued me before my incarceration, and with hard work I was a year clean, instead of abstinent. The desire to stay clean out in the world is the same desire I use in my incarceration, such as going to meetings, caring, and sharing faith and hope. It's been almost three years and I see the numbers coming in; things aren't getting any better. Someone shared that they are getting released in twenty days, and they have an overwhelming desire to use and only want to get high one more time, but we all know how that goes. I remember when I felt that way. I now have four years clean and I'm getting out in about ten months. I have my out date and I still attend my meetings. Recovery is my life, because without it I will be right back here. Family, I thank you for helping me save my life.

Sincerely,  
OB, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

22 August 1997 was the worst day of my life. After a thirteen-year bout with drugs, crime, and bad choices, I was arrested and knew I was facing my third strike. This would result in a life sentence without the possibility of parole. I lost everything I ever owned, and more importantly, the relationships I had. My family would be dramatically changed forever. I had two daughters who were devastated. We had only recently met and begun to develop a relationship. I was married at the time; however, my wife would end up leaving me, as she could not endure the rigors of a prison relationship.

I can recall the early years of my incarceration. There were several prison cliques, racial tension was high, assaults were a norm, and for the first time in my life I saw humanity in its worst form. I quickly realized that I had found hell on earth! As I began to assimilate myself into the prison subculture, I knew I had only two choices:

either become a hard-core convict or become a model inmate and hope one day to have a chance at freedom. I chose the latter. I began to participate in various programs. However, one of the meetings I was attending became problematic; guys would come over just to eat the cake, drink the coffee, and talk to their friends. I became disenchanted and stopped going.

I was finally transferred to a new prison. After a few years I decided to try going to NA. Once I began going, I really liked the meeting. I felt at home, and I really developed a great respect for the two outside sponsors who had come in to facilitate the meeting.

Things were going along as usual, when one day I discovered an error involving one of my prior strike convictions. After a year of some legal work and court appearances, that third-strike sentence was eventually vacated. I was resentenced, and I will be released in eleven short months!!

My friends from Narcotics Anonymous supported me through all of this. For the first time in many years I began to experience real friendships in recovery. Moreover, the things I learned in meetings are things that are going to stay with me upon my release back into the community. I am eternally grateful, but more than anything, I am motivated to make the most out of the miracle I have received.

I went from no hope to life filled with hope and promise. I owe so much of it to the positive reinforcement and support I have gained in NA. I have no doubt that had I not been involved in NA meetings and doing positive things, I would have been on the yard, in "the bag," and perhaps would have missed my blessing.

Having essentially lost my life, only to obtain it once again, has really put things in perspective for me. It is my sincere hope to further my education so I can help someone else while earning a decent living. Remaining involved in recovery will afford me the opportunity to do just that. Hope is truly a wonderful thing, something everyone should be blessed to enjoy.

Lifer no longer,  
VB, Washington

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RC and I am an addict. For me that statement has never been a very hard one to make. From day one I used in excess; it's just the doing something about it that's been the difficult part. I used to hide behind the fact that I was a dope fiend, because in my experience if I presented myself as just that, people knew what to expect and no longer would anyone be disappointed in what they got from me. That way I didn't have too much to have to live up to. By keeping that attitude toward life and what I chose to get out it, I earned myself unpleasant stay after unpleasant stay in jail, until eventually what life I did have on the streets, which I grieved for every time I got locked up, became so miserable and spiritually bankrupt that I turned myself in. I was expecting another chance at rehab, but only found myself with a sentence in prison. I had been given too many chances at rehab.

Today I know my higher power knows better than I do. I believe I needed to come to prison to finally get serious about my recovery. In the prison I'm in, it just so happens that everywhere I turn there is someone else I used with on the streets, so I am reminded on a daily basis that it doesn't work getting high out there. We all end up in the same place: jails, institutions, or death.

I am lucky enough to be in a facility that holds a meeting every Wednesday. The other day I was on my way across the yard, headed toward my meeting, and ran into an old using buddy who asked me what I was doing. I said I was on my way to a meeting and asked if she wanted to come. She rolled her eyes and said, "Oh, I don't go there." I continued on my way and just looked around at the drama, the arguing, and the dope games, and I thought to myself, "Oh, I don't go there!!" and walked into my meeting and had a great speaker inspire me to continue coming because I know it is going to save my life.

I was headed off to step group on Monday and it was raining as I headed out. There was a problem on the yard so I had to sit down on the wet cement and watch as some other inmates were handcuffed. At this point I was soaking wet, having to sit in the cold rain and feeling so alone. I looked down at my Step Working Guides and thought, "I need to go to any length for this recovery thing, just like I would to get a fix." I would sit for hours in the rain to score if I had to, so at that moment I knew it was well worth it and couldn't help

but smile, because I know I'm on the road to recovery. Thank you, *Reaching Out*, for letting me know that I am not alone.

RC, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is FL, and I am an addict. I was reading your January 2008 issue and the testimony really touched my heart, especially the sharing from CC and GW from New York. I have been incarcerated for the past eighteen months. I still have another thirty-three months to go. I was clean for eleven and a half years and decided to take my will back and try to do it my way again, to no avail. I've hit a bottom I never thought I could hit. What scares me the most is that I know every bottom has a trapdoor. I can gratefully say that I have fifteen months clean now, thank God and thank NA. We have one meeting a week, which I am so grateful for. The guys and the chairman from outside are really my source of communication; without them I don't think I would be clean. Like it says, as long as I have NA, I have nothing to fear. How true that is. You can't keep what you have unless you give it away.

Sincerely,  
FL, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JL, and I am a grateful recovering addict. I could not say that before 5 June of last year. Before that date I had been using strongly for eight years. It tore my life apart, and my family was destroyed due to my drug using. The only good thing that came out of my using drugs was the day I got arrested. It got me clean and made me realize how pointless the life I was living was. Today I have seven months clean. I am taking it one day at a time, and I am loving it. I get out in May of this year, and I will continue to take it a day at a time.

By the grace of my Higher Power,

JL, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Let me introduce myself. My name is RS, and I'm currently in prison, life plus thirty years because of my drug addiction. I am forty-one years old. You could have asked anyone about me, and they would have said I'm a respectful person and a very hard worker. That statement is probably true for most of us addicts. We are willing to work extremely hard to support our habit, even if it means doing something illegal. When it comes to giving up the habit, we don't work hard at all. We actually make it a lot harder than it really is.

Giving up drugs was the last thing on my mind for the first couple of years I was incarcerated. I failed a urine test, and when that happens you lose privileges, unless it's shower day. You get a couple of minutes a day of recreation, three hours a week, and they put you in something that looks like a dog kennel and you are permitted to walk around and get some sun. That was the turning point for me.

My family is behind me one hundred percent now, taking my phone calls, coming to visit on a regular basis, sending money. My thought was that we are the ones who get into trouble because of our addiction, but our families also pay the price. They love us, and they continuously worry about our safety, our health, and our well-being. My worst fear happened while I was in here: My father passed away. I have never had a more painful day in my entire life. I was not at home to comfort my mother, brothers, and sisters, and I was not home to receive a hug and also be comforted by them. That day I did something I haven't done in a very long time: I cried. I believe when you do drugs for a long time you kind of lose your feelings. All I cared about was me and my next high. I was self-centered, and everything revolved around me.

I've been drug-free now for a few years. I'm happy now, even though I got myself in quite a mess. Relations with my family are incredible, I know what is going on around me, and I actually care about others. I am able to say "thank you" or "sorry" and mean it. I made a choice a few years ago and it changed my life. A true friend of mine who I can never thank enough told me about choices. When you think about it, that's what it comes down to: making the right choices.

Thank you,  
RS, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

First of all I want to say that I'm new to the NA program. I really want to thank you for the supportive material that you sent to me in my starter package. I would like to share a bit of my story with all of you who read *Reaching Out*.

When I was twenty-one I started using, so what came after that was the criminal activity to support my drug habit. Prison is the worst, but I guess not bad enough, because when I paroled after serving sixteen months, I went right back to using. Well, *Reaching Out* friends, I am now forty-one and in prison. One of the inmates gave me something to read from NA, so I read it and liked what I read. I'm not alone out there. There are so many people like me. Man, I was so happy to get *Reaching Out* sent to me; thank you so much.

Drugs will take you in the opposite direction of your goals and your life. For me as a newcomer, NA is going to be my way!

Go with NA all the way,  
DS, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is R and I'm a recovering addict. I say recovering because I'm actively working the steps. I have been incarcerated since 2004. I have been addicted to drugs for twelve years. My release date is, at present, 2020. I have a sponsor who lives out of state, but have not heard from him in a while due to his poor health condition. At present I am housed in a prison that does not have NA meetings. Despite these three obstacles, I continue to work the steps daily and thoroughly because I believe, trust, and have faith that they will help me build a strong recovery foundation and also help me to continue my recovery from drugs and my addiction. Even though there are drugs in prison, I'm somewhat protected by not having as much access to them as I would on the street.

I look forward to getting to security-level prison where they have NA meetings so that I can expand my recovery program. The steps are the heart of the program, and I feel they are working for me because I have not been daydreaming about getting high as much as I used to. My ultimate hope is that the steps, along with other aspects of the program such as meetings, service work, and sponsor work, will keep me from ever using drugs for the rest of my life,



and continue to help me recover from my addiction. May all who seek recovery from drugs and addiction seek it by actively working the NA program.

Sincerely,  
RM, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Well, Happy New Year to all. I hope that everyone's holidays went well and everyone got the things they wanted. The most important thing we need is our loving fellowship and the encouragement of other people in recovery. I believe that 2008 has lots of miracles waiting for us all. The miracle is when another addict finds our program of recovery and a new way of life. It truly is a miracle to me because I never believed there was a life without drugs. I have found that there is a life, and I am much happier without them and with the program of Narcotics Anonymous in my life. Sounds strange, I am sure, to most people who have not yet experienced the miracle and self-pride of staying clean, working the steps, applying the principles in all my affairs, sharing the message, and doing service work.

Today I am clean, crime-free, honest, and happy. I have my sanity back and purpose in my life. Today I have a real life, even though I am incarcerated and have been this time since 1996. I am free in my heart, soul, and mind. I am able to be me without drugs, just a better version. I look forward to being able to share that person with my family and friends in the community some day. Until that day I will continue to carry the message here and wherever I am. There is so much more to life than these places or the lifestyle that always leads us here.

There is life after drugs. We all deserve that life. So do our families and communities. So yes, 2008 is another year of miracles. So help us spread the miracle of recovery and carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

In Service,  
EN, Oregon

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict; my name is M. I'm currently awaiting sentencing at a federal detention center in Rhode Island.

My journey of recovery began in 1996 through Narcotics Anonymous—working the steps with a sponsor, having a Higher Power, and being of service. I was blessed by being afforded the chance at having a life free from active addiction, and beyond my wildest dreams.

My road to relapse was, as it is said, cunning and baffling. At five and half years clean I began to isolate myself, and my sponsor and I lost our bond. I felt justifiable anger toward certain situations in my life and I took my will back. Needless to say, I lost contact with my Higher Power. I picked up in a much worse place than where I had left off and fought to run hard. Every time my HP tried to put someone or something in my path, I just pushed past. After having some time and going back out, I tried so hard to fill that void, knowing I was doing the wrong thing and maintaining a position of intolerance and indifference toward spiritual principles. My anger and resentments would not allow me to surrender again.

I was rescued by several agencies working toward a common good. They saved my life, where my disease would not allow others to get through. After almost five years of relapse I was brought to my first meeting via H&I at this facility. My gratitude speaks today when I care and share the NA way. There is a weekly meeting brought in, and although I struggle sometimes from minute to minute, just for today I am free and actively seeking recovery. It is such a relief and blessing to have this feeling again in my life. Every time I'm rereading some literature, at the meeting, or talking to a fellow member, I feel like I am reunited with a long-lost friend. My HP is doing for me what I cannot, and would not, do for myself.

Thank you,  
MC, Rhode Island

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is KD and I'm an addict. I just received my first letter from *Reaching Out*. Reading the stories really touched me.

Before coming to prison I lived in a dark world. My addiction stole my life and left me powerless to manage my life. I walked the streets late at night, trying to hustle and con people. I got arrested, and once again I am sitting in jail.

I began my recovery. I went to a meeting and spoke about my addiction, and later that evening at dinner I convinced myself to go again. They say something you hear will turn your life around. I heard stories that saved people; I heard sad stories that changed people. My story is sad. My father was shot and killed because of my addiction, and I wanted to get high. I pray every night to my Higher Power to continue to help me through the bitter nights. Drugs stole my life and took my father.

Since I've been in prison my addiction has been at rest, though I know the battle isn't over. I am fighting to stay clean every day. In prison I could get high and risk my chances of going home. When I hear about a person wanting to continue doing drugs while in prison, I think, "What a fool." I have learned a lot from NA meetings and from the guests who come inside these prison walls to share their experience, strength, and hope with inmates. Since being incarcerated I have been involved in NA and many other programs that are available in here. These programs have provided me with information to help me when I am released in November. I thank my Higher Power and the guests who speak at meetings, and the inmates who also share their experience.

When I walk these prison halls the real recovery starts. I'll really have to show how honest I am about my recovery. I choose to keep the good life I have today and practice what the program has offered me. The steps I choose are willingness, open-mindedness, and honesty. They say you have to live recovery in order to feel recovery; in my heart I believe I can stay clean. So wish me success, and God bless everyone. Thanks again for the letters and encouragement.

I'll Live Honestly,  
KD, New York

# FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is C, and I am in recovery. I am the GSR and treasurer of my home group while I also work in a couple of prisons here in Pennsylvania. I'm also in a position that deals with medical issues, so for me it's about living the program in and out of prisons and every day being in a position to help others, even in a subtle, behind-the-scenes way. I love to take the opportunity to share the message when no one even realizes I am in recovery! An attitude of gratitude — that's my spirit of recovery.

I know my Higher Power is using me as an example. I live free of drugs in and out of prison. I know that being an active addict put me in positions where if I had been caught I could have been in prison today, on the other side of those bars. So for me, today, I'm right where I belong and I'm grateful to be there.

This year my sponsor and I are working on a step a month, Step One in January and so on, and our end-of-the-month dinner at my house to go over the step together is an event I look forward to. I have many new tools to use in my recovery. My life feels complete; nothing's missing anymore.

CV, Pennsylvania

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I decided to write this for numerous reasons. I wanted to share an awesome experience I had while participating in an H&I meeting. Perhaps it may inspire another NA member to participate in H&I service. I know the experience has deepened my gratitude, and has actually deepened a sense of pride that my journey has put me on a path that involves doing service the NA way through H&I. I also wanted to share this with the men and women who are the recipients of H&I service, and share one of the reasons NA members go out of their way and take time out of their day to drive out to an institution to carry an NA message of hope and freedom to the addict who still suffers.

I, personally, have been participating in H&I service for way over twenty years, which in itself is testimony to the power and beauty of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Nineteen-plus years were spent primarily going into county jails and correctional facilities/prisons. I can't explain to you what that has done for my recovery. I've had many spiritually rewarding experiences by doing what those who came before me taught me to do.

Anyway, a little while back I was asked to take one of those nice, fairly long drives to participate in an H&I meeting at an institution. The panel leader who asked told me that in the past five or six months they had only gotten into the institution once, so if I didn't want to come he would understand. Once again I only did what others have taught me to do—do my part, and my part was to show up.

Well, we got in that night, which was a good thing. We went to the chapel where we were going to have the meeting, put out the literature, and sat down to wait for the inmates to file in.

The meeting started in the traditional H&I manner, the panel chair opening the meeting and getting different guys to do the readings. Then the panel leader stated that he would share a little before he turned the meeting over to me and another panel participant, followed by questions or sharing if any of the fellas wanted or needed to participate.

Being there was great, made me feel good, etc., etc., etc. What happened next was one of those moments when one sentence can really make the whole experience that much more worthwhile. That one sentence brought a lump into my throat and my eyes misted over, and I looked out into the audience, and they felt it too.

What the panel chairperson shared that night, that one sentence that I will never forget, is this: "The reason we are here tonight is that we didn't want you to think that we've forgotten about you." I don't know how you're reacting to this as you read it, but the night that was shared it impacted a roomful of men who were all striving for the same thing—a daily reprieve from the insanity of the disease that wants to take us all out.

I can only hope that A asks me to come on a panel with him again in the very near future. I know the experience will enrich my recovery. Thank you, NA, and thank you, HP, for allowing my journey to cross the path of a member who got me involved with H&I.

HS, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is A, and I am a woman in recovery.

I began using when my husband passed away. From then on I used continuously. I felt very down thinking about my late husband. I used it as an excuse. I thought I would die using.

But there came the day when I was physically not well. Even though I tried to stop, I would always start using again—just one more.

I became more and more desperate when I remembered one of my friends sharing some of her experiences, and how she was in recovery.

I went and spoke with her and she said to me, “You have to make the decision. Who do you want to be, and what do you want to do?” I made the decision that I wanted something different, and it was then that I was introduced to NA.

Not too long after my introduction I attended the area H&I subcommittee meeting. I decided to join the subcommittee.

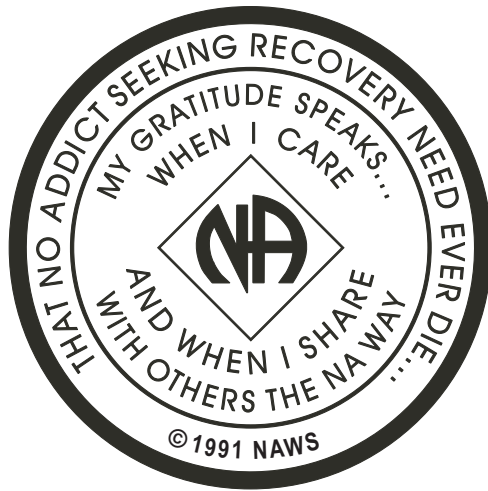
Being in recovery and being a member of the H&I committee, I have learned a lot about myself. I have even become friends with a few of the other women in NA.

Being involved in H&I has carried me through my recovery. I look forward to my panel each and every month, having the opportunity to give hope to those who believe they are hopeless, with no self-worth or self-confidence, and to let them know that dreams do come true.

Today I know that one of the most important things I can do is show up at NA and at that H&I panel meeting. It shows me that it is possible for my Higher Power to work miracles in my life. Thank you, God.

I am truly grateful to NA and to H&I.

AC, Imphal, India



*“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.

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