

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 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.

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 fmail@na.org.

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

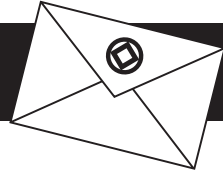


Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
July 2009	15 April 2009
October 2009	15 July 2009
January 2010	15 October 2009
April 2010	15 February 2010



FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is ZD and I am an addict. Before coming to prison I was able to stay clean for about nine years, having been involved with another program. Although I worked through the steps, I was unable to get help for the addiction I struggled with, as it was not within my sponsor's ability to see my powerlessness. I was sentenced to sixty-eight months in June of 2008. I hope to attend meetings here. There is one NA meeting a month and that is where I get the *Reaching Out*. I have nine years and four months clean, and the NA program has given me freedom from active addiction. I had a lot going for me, and still have a great family and friends. I have let them down in a huge way, but they are still there for me. Even in NA I have found acceptance and family, my NA family, and for this I am eternally grateful. I am also grateful to the people of NA's H&I. I am very touched by their care and commitment to us here behind the walls.

ZD, Washington

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is HB and I'm a recovering addict. Five weeks ago I gave birth to a baby girl, while incarcerated. My family has my daughter and I've seen her once since she was born. I have to say I'm struggling. This is simply the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. I spent nine hours with my baby, and then they took her from me and took me back to the institution where I am incarcerated. Several letters from fellow NA members awaited me. In the midst of my pain, my NA family has rallied together to provide comfort and support.

At first, I questioned my higher power: "How could you allow this to happen to me? How do I cope?" I realize now that my higher power allowed me to write through this so that I can become stronger and wiser.

I started taking classes here at the institution to become an optician when I go home. I'll have a profession so I can care for my daughter and myself. I am using this time to prepare for a new life, one

without the use of drugs. Thirteen months from now I will walk out of these gates and into an NA meeting, carrying my daughter on my hip. She deserves a mother, and with the help of the NA Fellowship I will be the best mother I can be. NA saved both our lives and I'm lucky to be alive.

HB, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

This is the third time in the last eight years that I have put myself in a prison environment due to my drug addiction. This time I feel more confident in my ability to stay clean due to my taking a really deep, HONEST look inside myself.

I know that I must fill in the voids that used to be my rationale for using. Now I need to stay "plugged in" by becoming involved in the real world and giving of myself. I must find a good home group, do charitable work, and join a club or organization. I will become like those individuals whom I choose to associate with.

The lightbulb began to turn on for me when I did a serious, sincere Fourth Step. I looked deep inside and wrote down all I had done to myself and to others. I listed all my issues and my inadequacies that helped to lead me down a pathway of destruction. Yes, it hurt a lot, but it opened my eyes and released me from the fears and burdens that I had been carrying for many years. The release was a true relief and started me on my journey to a new and clean destination. I no longer fear my addiction, yet I do respect it enough to keep it at arm's length.

To use an analogy, I had to scrape off my rust, then put on a primer, and then paint. All of these steps were and are necessary to getting real and understanding myself and looking for solutions to continue along a pathway of righteousness.

Soon I will be free. I now feel at peace, with the confidence and tools necessary to "maintain" and have a good rest of my life. To paraphrase a line in a song by Cat Stevens, "the answers lie within." As our guidelines tell us, honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are the keys.

AZ, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is ST and I am an addict. After ten years of abstinence I relapsed. I wasn't using, but I had no cleantime. I had no foundation, no program, no God, no spiritual principles. I have proven that I cannot do it alone.

My first trip to jail was a result of supporting a habit. Between 1995 and 2005 I was abstinent inside, and on the street I felt that I didn't need NA, God, or anything else. That was a near-fatal mistake.

One drink is all it took. That one was too many, and of course a thousand wasn't enough. It wasn't long after that first drink that I was using and in full-blown addiction all over again. Alcohol is a drug. For those three and a half or four years I was killing myself with as much dope and alcohol as I could do. Addiction truly is ugly, and the ugly side of addiction is devastating.

I tried to quit several times on my own, only to use more. I was at the point where it was not a question of "if" I was going to get high, but of how much and how I might get the money. My life was totally out of control. I realized I was addicted.

It is by the grace of God that I got arrested and now sit in jail. I have been going to the Easy Does It group of NA here and love it. I was blessed by my new sponsor with *The NA Step Working Guides*. I have done the stepwork in the book and have found out so much about myself and the disease that I did not know. For the first time in my life I have a relationship with God, my higher power. I have turned my life and will over to his care; how peaceful it is to know that I'm not alone anymore. I practice the spiritual principles in everything I do, take daily inventories, and when I'm wrong promptly admit it. I try to carry the message to addicts and just try to help people however I can, and it feels great.

I want to encourage addicts who are thinking about working the program to give yourselves a break and work it—because it works.

I will close by thanking God, NA, *Reaching Out*, my sponsor, and all who work through the Twelve Steps; you have shown me a new way to live—CLEAN.

ST, Texas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is MB and I'm an addict. I was once very active in the program, and stayed clean for ten years. You know the story — stopped going to meetings, stopped working with my sponsor. I lost everything the program had blessed me with—a beautiful wife, three beautiful children, home, cars, and my freedom. I picked up in 1997, and came to jail for the first time in 1999 at age thirty-six. I've had two chances at freedom since. Not wanting to face the guilt and shame, I picked up both times.

This time I found NA. I'm working the steps and have God in my life. I have recently had contact with my wife, who has eight months clean and is also working a program. God has truly worked miracles in my life and my family's life. When I pick up my *Reaching Out* magazine I'm at home with my fellow inmates across the country, and I just want to say God bless and thank you.

MB, Rhode Island

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is DF. I'm from Florida. I am thirty-eight years old. I've been using ever since I was sixteen, but due to the fact that I'm in prison I have learned to take my life more seriously, without the use of drugs. I've been locked up twice now for the same thing. My first time I got four years and didn't take that seriously enough to stop, so I got out with that same mind to get fast money. But this time I'm in this recovery program that has opened doors for me to remain drug-free. I can truly say I love who I am today, and just for today I will take life more seriously than I did before. Yes, I'm willing to go to any length to stay clean.

I have been in prison now for seven years and have six months more to go. I'll truly be glad when I get out so I can help my daughter raise my grandbaby. I came to know my higher power back in 1996, but I didn't rely on him until my second trip in prison; that's when I decided to give God a try, and ever since then I have been too blessed to be stressed. I can say that God has opened so many doors for me that no man can shut. Anything can be possible with God and by going to NA meetings, because it works if you work it.

Since I've been in recovery I have come to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me back to my kids and family.

I have also admitted to God, myself, my kids, and my family the exact nature of my wrongs, and I also let them know that I truly am powerless over my addiction and am willing to make amends to them all.

Thank you for letting me share my strength and hope with other addicts like myself. I hope I have touched someone's heart, as many *Reaching Out* letters have touched mine. I will take my recovery out with me when I'm free from these prison gates.

DF, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name JA and I am a newly blessed recovering addict. I have been a slave to my disease for thirty-nine years, and I have spent thirty-four years incarcerated in juvenile and prison, all because I was running away from the pain of being sexually abused in childhood by one of my own brothers. As a result of that I had a lot of fear, anger, resentment, low self-esteem, and a rebellious attitude. One day when I was eight years old I sniffed a drug in a bag, and from that moment I knew I had found a friend to cure my pain—or so I thought.

For the next thirty-three years I did anything and everything to escape reality. I was in and out of prison, always self-centered and a know-it-all. For twelve years I made some attempts at finding recovery. I had my cleantime off and on, the longest being three years, but over and over I continued to return to using. After four prison bids (I am currently on my fourth one), I still had the insanity in me and I decided to take some drugs and went back to my cell. I took the rest of the drug and flushed it down the toilet. I lay down on my bed and I told myself if I didn't make an attempt to find recovery, then the rest of my life would be spent in prison. At that point I hit my knees and told my God, "I have been praying for your help; I beg you and ask you to please do whatever you must, regardless of the repercussions." Not long after that there was a random drug test at which I admitted I had used.

I am, for the first time in my life, truly at peace with myself. I have been clean now for forty-three days. I have realized I was still holding onto reservations, so I turned to my higher power to rid me of them, and he did. I started looking at my obsessions and compulsive

behavior and what part they played in my life, and I then became aware that to me that was the driving force of my disease. I have come to realize and accept that my obsessive-compulsive behavior is part of my life, and in order to admit it I must acknowledge and accept it. I now do, though I am not able to attend meetings because I am locked in my cell twenty-four hours a day as a result of my dirty urine. I have learned to let go and let God, and trust me, I have been tested.

My wife took off with my only child. I was able to accept it and move on, something I could never have done by my own willpower. I can honestly say that for now my recovery is in the literature. My gratitude is felt when I reach out to others, and my blessings come by hitting my knees on the cement floor. Today I know that I do not have to pick up so long as I trust in my higher power. I read my literature and apply my Twelve Steps to the best of my ability.

The key to success in recovery is ACTION—if you don't work it, it doesn't work you. I have come to realize this after thirty-nine years of being a slave to my disease. I can't wait to return to the rooms to give back what has been given to me so freely.

JA, NewYork

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 had 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 and 1996 during my nine-month probation violation in county jail. I never went 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 JH who told me that they have to open the door sooner or later. CO 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. I received five years' probation for this offense and walked it off thanks 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 luckily, I beat the case. I was guilty of a relapse, though. I used off and on for two years, each time hitting a new bottom. I realize now this disease does not discriminate and does not care if you have six and a half years clean, as in my case.

I have recovery today and I am grateful for that. I do not worry about the future and about whether I am going to relapse anymore, because that is the type of thinking that took me out. My sponsor and support group help me, and so do the incarcerated NA addicts with their writings. 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 write because not many of you hear from people on the outside. I know how lonely it is in there, and how I used to think people on the outside didn't care because I had no visitors for nine solid

months and was placed in solitary confinement for some time. Today I have no open cases and am not on probation, thanks to God and you 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 had and lost.

My sponsor helps me and I go to NA meetings, and when I get ninety days, God willing, I would love to speak at a meeting and/or chair a meeting. When I get a year clean, God willing, I would love to come into a facility and share what you 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. I decided not to cop today. All of you incarcerated children of God who choose not to cop in the facility are the ones who 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 her son back!

God Bless,
C, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I have been an addict for more than twenty-five years. I have been through four rehabs. No NA was available to me then. Now I am serving a one-year sentence because I was mandated to a rehab and I didn't complete it. I know in my heart that I can stay clean by having faith in my Higher Power and staying plugged into the program of NA. Through this, I can get back to a normal way of life and being a responsible father to my children.

Thanks, NA, for another chance at making my life worthwhile.

TT, Georgia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JD and I'm an addict. I'm filled with gratitude and shivers while I'm writing this story. I have been involved in H&I for over eleven years. I was going to the prison every second week to see the guys and talk to them and share my strength and hope. One of them had two life terms in jail with no possibility of parole. He was to spend the rest of his life in prison. All along I was trying to instill some hope in this man's heart, telling him to pray and do whatever he could to keep busy and work his program to the best of his ability and always keep some hope because you never know what can happen.

I changed jobs and could no longer go to the meeting because of my schedule, and later on the meeting closed due to lack of involvement. Often I wondered how he was doing, hoping that he would remember some of the discussions we had and put into practice some of the tools that the meeting brought to him.

One day out of the blue I received a phone call from the coordinator at one of the facilities where the meeting was. He wanted me to come share at one of the meetings. I hesitated a bit, and he told me that he would really appreciate it and that he had a surprise for me. He got me curious, so I decided to go and share. I arrived at the meeting and sat down, having a coffee with the coordinator and some of the other inmates. Before we started the door opened and more inmates came in, and my back was turned to them so I didn't see them come in. A moment later, I heard his voice. I turned around to look, and it was him — the lifer with whom I had talked of hope. He proceeded to tell me he had a year left to do on his sentence, and he was married. He wanted to thank me for all the strength and hope that I had brought to him when he was in the maximum facility.

Just to see him in a minimum facility, ready to come out and enjoy his freedom, was one of the greatest gifts of my recovery.

I still do serve in H&I; you wonder why?

I won't get high while doing H&I.

With gratitude,
JD, Canada

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is MB and I'm an addict. The last day I used was 27 November 1996. It was the day before Thanksgiving. Seven days later I found myself in a six-month treatment facility. As it turned out, it was the first Wednesday of December and that night an H&I panel came in to do a presentation. I remember looking at the speaker and thinking, "What does he have to offer me?" As he shared, I remember thinking that he hadn't said anything about prison, Harleys, or the kind of dope I did or even the kind of lifestyle I'd been living. He had short hair and no tattoos. I disqualified him for all of these external things.

Then I remember he started sharing about some things that made me really uncomfortable. Things like fear, isolation, loneliness, guilt, shame, and remorse. He talked about how, at the end of his using the dope hadn't worked anymore, and that he had become suicidal. I couldn't disqualify him anymore because he was telling my story. A week earlier I had stuck a pistol in my mouth because no matter how much dope I did, I couldn't stop the pain of those feelings. With the help of a higher power that I didn't know anything about, I lived through that moment and made it to this meeting to hear him share. He went on to share that I never had to use again...just for today. "Never" seemed like a long time, but I thought I could make it through one more day. That was over twelve years ago, and I haven't had to use since then.

Today I'm allowed to live a life I never could have imagined. Through the process of working and living the Twelve Steps as a member of NA, I've been given gifts beyond my wildest imagination—gifts I never knew were gifts, like the ability to be a father to my son, a son to my mother, relationships, and healthy relationships with all of my family. I'm employed today and self-supporting. One of the best gifts I've been given is being able to carry the message back into the prisons which were once my home, and into the treatment centers in and around the areas where I did most of my using. I get to work with other addicts who are just like I was when I first walked in. That addict who shared his/our message with me is now with me every other Wednesday in a prison meeting he helped us start over ten years ago. Thank you, NA, for allowing me the gift of life and the chance to share it the same way it was shared with me.

MB, Nebraska

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is B, and I'm an addict. I'd like to start by letting you all know that I, too, sat in the same seats that you are sitting in right now. NA was not a part of my life at the time and I felt very lonely and hopeless. Not knowing there was a way out for me, I suffered long after my release.

I was introduced to NA in 1990 and it has truly saved my life. I started to be with other addicts who were just like me and I started to get some hope. I found people who would love me long before I could possibly love myself. I was making NA meetings everyday and got involved in the H&I subcommittee. I got much joy in feeling like I was helping other addicts, mainly because the more time I spent helping others find that there was a better way to live, the less time I had to focus on how bad my life turned out. As time passed, all that changed. I no longer ran from myself, but I started to feel pain. I started to do the things I was hearing about like finding a sponsor, working the steps, etc. My sponsor was kind and gentle and taught me much more than just recovery stuff. He taught me how to grow up and become a man, to take responsibility for my life. My sponsor introduced me to the steps. That's where my life started to change, because I was changing as a person.

One of the greatest joys I've had in my recovery was when someone came up to me and said he remembered me from taking an NA meeting into their institution. I did not remember him, but he told me he was getting ready to celebrate one year clean. He asked if I would come to his homegroup and be there to participate in the celebration by giving him his cake. To me, that's what makes all this worthwhile.

So, I can leave you with this: if an addict like me can stop using and find a new way to live, it can also work for you. Please come and find us.

BS, Florida

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: If you are a recovering addict who is housed in a correction or treatment setting, let us hear how Narcotics Anonymous has helped you in your life. If it has been through working the Twelve Steps, how you have applied spiritual principles in a difficult situation, or how you came to find NA, send us a letter addressed "Dear *Reaching Out*." Many times the articles we receive cannot be used because they concentrate on using and not on how NA has helped addicts recover. Please keep this in mind when you write to us.

If you are a member of an H&I subcommittee, let others hear how you or your subcommittee have carried the NA message of recovery. If you have been released into the community and are doing well in recovery, please write to share your experience, strength, and hope from the outside, and help another addict to stay clean for another day.

We would like to thank all of the members who have sent in articles and other written contributions to the newsletter. We all have a responsibility to the suffering addict and to ourselves as recovering addicts to do our best to carry the Narcotics Anonymous message of recovery—to participate by sharing with others what we have been freely given.



“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”

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*.
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