

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 fsmail@na.org.

Work is underway to make *Reaching Out* submissions even easier. Once developed, these tools will be introduced in *Reaching Out*, *The NA Way Magazine*, and our website http://www.na.org/reaching_out/index.htm.

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

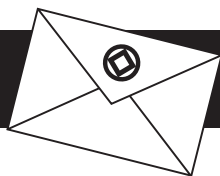


Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
July 2010	15 April 2010
October 2010	15 July 2010
January 2011	15 October 2010
April 2011	15 January 2011



FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is TR and I am an addict. I have been incarcerated for seven months as a direct result of my relapse. I have been battling my disease for the last 17 years. This led me in and out of prison. I was first introduced to NA through institutions. When I was released in 2002, NA had changed my life. I attended meetings regularly, I got a sponsor who guided me through the Twelve Steps, I joined a home group, and I was of service at a group level. NA has truly saved my life, time and time again.

I'm due to be released in four months, free from the system for the first time in 17 years. I am truly grateful for my support group, sponsor, and Higher Power. Because of NA, I have a solid foundation to lean on. With the help of NA, I never have to use again upon my release.

This is for the addict who still suffers: With NA you never have to be alone or use again. Thank you, *Reaching Out*, for the hope you give to incarcerated inmates.

TR, Pennsylvania, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm lying here in this cell (once again) at 53 years old, thinking, "If only I had completed the 28-day program, I wouldn't be here." I thank God that his will was to stop me before I even really got started. I relapsed twice within a month for approximately two days each time.

My health was so messed up from the drugs; I wonder why I picked up again. I believe it was to see if I could get away with it. But I'm going to NA here at this facility, and the meetings have made me aware that the steps are a must. I never really want to use again; I want to finally stay clean and be part of society and enjoy the rest of my life. Right now I'm working on Step Six; with my God's guidance, I'm doing a pretty good job. Any other time I have been in lockdown, I haven't cared. But my character is changing, and the humility is coming with it. As long as I continue to go to meetings and put into action what I've learned here, I know God won't steer

me wrong. I'll make myself and my son proud. I know now that it does work if you work it, and I'm going to work it because I'm worth it, and I'll live it too! Try it; it doesn't cost you anything!

RA, New York, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is MF and I am an addict. I am 40 years old and have been hooked on drugs for about eleven years. Thanks to county and state prison, currently I have some cleantime—not much on my own, I'm ashamed to say. My family and counselors have declared me an addict of the hopeless variety. My self-will has run riot over and over again, to the point of homelessness and antisocialism. I was eating from restaurant garbage cans. I have come across so many similarities from the pages of NA to my own life; these pages have become my second bible. I have been to rehabs before, but recently I was given a chance at rehab in prison and began attending NA meetings. Even though I failed the program miserably, I am glad to have come into the NA family. I know now that I can obtain abstinence because I am accepted for the addict I am. I have read a lot of pages about obsession, compulsion, relapse, and recovery. I have more hope now than ever before, even though I am still afraid to fail another sponsor. My choice to live *Just for Today* has lifted my faith to the next level of hope.

MF, Texas, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict and my name is KO. Today I am blessed to be alive and also very grateful. I'd like to share my experience, strength, and hope with you. You are my NA family. First of all, I am a 27-year-old male who is about to serve some serious time. These are the consequences I have to pay due to my addiction. Honestly, NA has saved my life from the depth of insanity that I reached.

I was an addict who only had one agenda, and this was to get loaded! I made a career out of it. I would put drugs at the front of the line and everything else behind. Then one day, at age 24, this "great" career was put to an end. I had a rude visit by some law enforcement personnel in vests and ski masks. Part of my sentence was treatment. I had my addict mind telling me that I could comply and manipulate

the system. That did not work so well; I was ordered to go to inpatient rehab. I finished this and went to long-term treatment at the court's recommendation. While I was in treatment, I found the rooms of NA. I heard a good message and even got a sponsor. The thing was, I lacked honesty. After this, I was sentenced and sent to a maximum-security prison. I lasted eight months before relapsing. This is what I want to stress to anyone who toys with reservations about alcohol: "Alcohol is a drug!" After a time, I got caught. I had more consequences to suffer, but as I now see it, God was doing it for me.

After seven months in the hole, I got shipped to another state. This is where I sit now. I am blessed, because I have found my seat. I now have a sponsor, work steps, work with others, go to meetings, and no matter what, I don't use! Yes, I have hard days, but if I hand it over to my Higher Power, life is good.

Thank you for reading this, and remember: It Works!

KO, South Carolina, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I would like to thank NA for the *Reaching Out* newsletter that goes out to prisoners who are incarcerated. I am incarcerated and fighting a case that is the direct result of my drug addiction and the poor choices I made while under the influence.

The Narcotics Anonymous program has saved my life. I was delusional and suicidal when I was first arrested, and have come to believe through the NA program that there is hope for me. I can remember feeling so hopeless and lost when I was arrested. Now, I look at it as though I was rescued. Regardless of the outcome of my case, I am happy to have been saved from the self-destructive lifestyle I lived. I have been arrested before and have been in and out of jails since I was twelve. I even served 68 months flat in a woman's prison, and none of this was ever enough for me to want to quit using. Each of those times I spent incarcerated, I was using and finding ways and means to get and use more. Leaving behind the family that loved me and hurting them time and time again because of my drug addiction, has caused me much pain and guilt.

The difference in me today happened when I found myself sick and tired of being imprisoned within myself to the disease of addiction. Doing time clean is changing my life. When I showed up to the rooms of NA through the Hospitals and Institutions volunteers, I

found a new hope in life, in God, and in myself. It came from those in NA who had faith in me. They believed that I could change, that I could live without drugs and alcohol. I am going to be 40 this year, and through the NA program I have been able to make amends to those I have hurt, reconcile my relationships with my family, and reestablish dignity within myself. I have done these things by learning honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness through the spiritual principles of NA. The obsession to use drugs has subsided, and I have been able to work through the pain that I was suffering. I have come to believe that I am in the grips of a progressive disease known as addiction, but there is hope for me to get better through the steps suggested in the program.

I am still not sure where I am headed inside these walls, but what I do know is that I have been given a new lease on life, a new chance to live life clean. I know that whatever I face today, I will be able to face it with dignity, and that God will continue to restore my sanity as I continue to work the program. Thanks to NA and the members who believed in me when I did not have the courage to believe in myself.

ED, California, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm DB and I'm an addict. I've been clean now for 21 months. I'm 48 years old and I've had a drug problem all my life. I first became involved with NA back in the late 1980s. I got two years clean back then. My life was great during those two years. I got real involved with service, and life had real purpose. But I guess it all came too easy for me. I decided I wasn't like "those people," and that it would be okay to pick up again. If only I'd known what that decision would cost me.

For the last 20 years my life has been a disaster. I've lost my home, business, and everything else of value. I've gone through two marriages and lost contact with my children. I have two grandchildren I've never met. My addiction cost me the power of choice. I remember telling myself I still wasn't that bad. At least I'd never been in prison. Well, in 2007, guess what happened? I went to prison.

I've learned that prison doesn't have to be all bad. My head has cleared and I've gotten my power of choice back. There aren't any

outside meetings in the facility where I am, but I'm in the substance abuse program here and they use the NA books in the program. My only contact with outside NA is by mail. Thank God for the WSO! Prison has given me a good chance to establish my relationship with God and to take a real hard look at myself. I use my time to work the steps, talk with other recovering addicts, and carry the message. For the first time in 20 years, I'm excited about my future. Now I realize that I'm exactly like "those people." Thank you, NA.

DB, California, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am WD and I'm an addict. I am enjoying recovery by practicing the NA way of life. For me, to recover is to return to the "being" created by my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God.

I am moving away from being the person who evolved as a result of living in a cruel environment. My life began in a medium-income neighborhood, but the life I lived did not reflect where I was raised. I became the neighborhood hoodlum. The crimes I committed kept me behind the walls. I share my story to help others have hope.

In prison I used and stayed in the mix, thinking that this behavior was making life easier; it wasn't. The way I live today is much easier. I don't have the constant drama of finding ways and means to get more. I enjoy holidays without getting high, and I am not miserable due to mind-altering substances. In an NA meeting, a peer shared that I am one of those people he didn't think existed. I stay clean, don't get high on drugs, don't gamble, and I treat others the way I want to be treated. I stay that way by going to meetings, living the steps, having a sponsor, sponsoring others, and being of service.

I like the person I am today. It took an honest, fearless, moral inventory to discover why I had become such a screwed-up person. My first Fourth Step inventory was heavy in immorality, deficient in assets, and it showed that I was downright disgraceful, a despicable human being. I stayed clean anyway. My inventory today is heavy in assets, low in liabilities, and filled with gratitude. I am bursting with love, am loved by my family and friends, and I am capable of loving them. I have learned to accept others in light of their character defects, as I have learned to do with myself. I am serene. Thanks for letting me share.

WD, South Carolina, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is EZ and I'm a grateful recovering addict. I am currently serving 18 months for drug-related crimes. I started using at a very young age. I somehow graduated high school, and then went to federal prison at 18 years old. Once I was released, my disease progressed. I was that addict whose living skills were literally reduced to the animal level. In 2005 I was rescued and mandated to a treatment facility, where I was first introduced to NA. I was no longer a victim, and I found hope. I stayed clean for two and a half years, but got complacent. I was no longer maintaining my recovery; subconsciously I was working on a relapse. I thank my Higher Power for doing for me what I couldn't do for myself. I have eight months clean today through the grace of my God. I just got married, and I'm once again full of hope! If anyone is new to this program, I'd like to tell you: "It works if you work it!"

EZ, Texas, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JZ and I'm an addict. It seems like I've been around forever. I am writing in gratitude for the program and the fellowship that comes with it. I think most of us would like to put 2009 behind us, but especially me. I never thought I could feel as much pain and turmoil as I did when I first got clean. Then the abuse I suffered as a teenager that led to my drug addiction resurfaced, forcing me to finally deal with my underlying core issue. However, this meant relocation to a different unit, away from my supportive NA friends.

NA was almost nonexistent in my new unit, and I was not strong enough to give freely. I needed love, I needed compassion, and I felt like I needed to *be* in a meeting, not run one. Over the next few months I became increasingly depressed. I wallowed around like a zombie, thinking suicide would be easier. White-knuckle recovery and emotional pain as an oldtimer were far worse than any physical pain I've ever felt. It is certainly true that an addict alone is in bad company.

Then, one day, a miracle happened. The institution I'm in decided to combine the recreation office and the library. After moving bookshelves around, I looked up and there it was: a Basic Text! It was a gift from God staring right back at me! I instantly remembered who

I was, that I am never alone, that everything happens for a reason, and that God never gives us more than we can handle. If I keep who I am, where I've been, and where I'm going at the forefront of my mind, I will be happy, joyous, and free.

On 14 April I'll celebrate 25 years clean. I've never been as humbled as I was in this last year of my recovery. If you're an oldtimer, give yourself a break. If you know an oldtimer and haven't seen them in a while, pick up the phone, pick them up, go to a meeting, and pick their brain. Sometimes we're out there, just waiting to hear from you.

My favorite meeting always ended with the third paragraph of "We Do Recover". Today, even more than ever, it rings true, and today I choose a new way to live! Today, I run the NA meeting on the yard. I've learned that to give love is to get love. Thanks, NA.

JZ, Arizona, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is EJ and I'm an addict. I have been incarcerated since January 2005. I have been a user since the age of ten. I first encountered recovery in 1999, but relapsed in 2001. Now I've been clean three and a half years. This time, I'm doing my step work and building a relationship with my Higher Power.

Before I got clean, I'll be the first to admit, I was headed for death; the vile grip of addiction had its claws wrapped around my soul. Finding NA again was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Now I can truthfully say I have my life back.

I'm currently involved in NA once a week, which is like a breath of fresh air. I have learned a lot about honesty and respect, which I've made part of my daily life. My self-esteem has grown by leaps and bounds. By the grace of God, I've become a brand-new man. One day at a time, step by step, I walk with faith and confidence. I thank God, who is my Higher Power, and NA.

EJ, Florida, USA

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

Narcotics Anonymous gave me a life worth living. Twenty-five years ago, I was not sure that I wanted a productive, responsible, drug-free life. In fact, going to church basements with a bunch of addicts was not my cup of tea. Yet my choices were stark—go to NA or return to prison to complete parole institutionalized. That latter choice was not an option for me; I am stubborn, and no one was going to win their bets on the inside. There was “gate money” riding on me—would I be returned in a week? two weeks? etc. So, I figured after doing time, I could go to NA until I was done with parole.

Attitude and all, I started to attend NA meetings. Fortunately, I had no idea “keep coming back” was a cliché. I thought using addicts were sincere when they said that phrase to me. No one had asked me back anywhere for the longest time, and NA wanted me to come back. That was my first glimpse of self-worth; I do matter. My first glimmer of hope came at three weeks clean. I had the opportunity to attend a convention. When 500 addicts gathered to close the meeting, I looked around the circle and decided that if all these folks could do this recovery thing, so could I. Now the work for me began.

Staying off drugs and recovering from the disease of addiction are two very different actions. For me, to recover and change, I needed to work the steps. I could readily identify the unmanageability and the insanity of my behaviors and attitudes. Yet turning my will and my life over to the care of a Higher Power seemed insurmountable. At 18 months clean, I asked the “biggest and baddest dude” that I knew if he had made the decision called for in the Third Step. When he replied, “Yes,” and spoke with me, I became willing. That was the first time that tears ran down my cheeks in 28 years.

Putting practical life choices into action in early recovery was challenging. My stumbling block was employment. Who would employ a convicted criminal in a career that would pay me enough to raise my child? To answer my own question: No one. I needed to return to higher education to obtain degrees in a field that would hire career criminals. There were not many career choices, but it was the step

that I needed to take to provide for my son and myself. Navigating single parenting, personal recovery, education, and service to NA was a challenge. Gratitude is an action word for me. At thirty days clean I started to give back, through service, to the fellowship that saved my life, and I continue giving to this day. The phrase “anything you put before your recovery” helped me to remain free of the social acceptability trap of having no time to be of service and work my steps. Service and recovery are synonymous in my life—I will walk that extra mile so addicts have the opportunity to hear our message of recovery. Members were there for me, and I want to be available for members today.

JN, Connecticut, USA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

When I came home in May it was nothing like what I expected. I expected my family, especially my husband, to be so excited that they would be all over me. Well, as it turned out, they had all built lives without me in the four years I was gone. My girls had boyfriends and friends they did things with, and my husband had activities he was involved in every day of the week. He bowls, takes a meeting into a halfway house, and is the chairperson for our group-conscience meetings. He attends area service meetings and has a support group that talks every day and often does things together. Then there are his sports—he plays softball one night a week and does all kinds of football stuff. He thought that I would be tagging along with him to all his things. I tried for a while, but I couldn’t keep up; nor do I care for sports. It was hard at first; I felt like he didn’t love me because he wouldn’t change his schedule to be with me. He felt like I didn’t care enough to be a part of the new life he had built. It all worked for him, but it wore me out. We even went to marriage counseling for a while. The counseling was great; it helped us to understand each other and to realize that we love each other very much. We are just very different people.

I realized that I need down time. I like being home and decorating our house, cleaning it, pampering it, and just enjoying it. Being around people a lot stresses me out. I like going to social things and meetings and talking to people; however, I can only do it for a few hours at a time. My husband loves to be social and can do it

for days on end. I didn't understand his renewed relationships with schoolmates. Some of those were women, and I felt threatened. I didn't grow up the way he did; he had close friends who all still care deeply for each other. I don't even know any of the people I went to high school with anymore.

My whole world was foreign to me. I questioned whether I belonged anymore. I questioned my marriage, my life, and whether I would make it in the real world. I found that time heals a lot of things, and the program of Narcotics Anonymous helps misfits like me to fit in. The people in NA were so loving and accepting that I kept going. I developed friends of my own there. Now I have my own support group, I have a sponsor, and I work the steps. I even have a sponsee out here. We talk daily, meet once a week, and she listens to the suggestions that I give her. The point is, I had to develop a life of my own. I had to develop my own recovery. No one else can recover for me, nor can I work anyone else's program.

Now my husband and I are doing great. We are still making adjustments, but we don't question our love or commitment to our marriage and each other. We cherish the time we get together because it doesn't happen often. I've been holiday shopping, and I have to say that this is the first holiday season ever that I actually feel the spirit. I used to hate to hear holiday music; now I hear holiday music and I turn it up and sing along. Holiday shopping was a chore in the past; now it is a joy. I love looking at different things and considering whether they fit someone I'm shopping for. I care deeply for the people in my family and want to get them something they will enjoy.

We had 21 people at our home for Thanksgiving! And we are having Christmas dinner here, too. I love playing hostess. None of this would be possible without God and the program of Narcotics Anonymous. NA lets me know daily that I do belong, and that my feelings and thoughts are not so unusual. Addicts are very different people, but we learn to live responsible and productive lives, and to be contributors to our society rather than the takers we used to be. We care about mankind instead of using people for what we can get from them. We answer the call when there is an opportunity to help someone. Our lives now have meaning, and sometimes, through working the Twelve Steps, we even get back relationships that we destroyed in our active addiction.

My youngest daughter and her boyfriend went out the other night. I drove to pick them up at ten o'clock. Driving around at night in the cold and the dark reminded me of all the miserable nights I used to chase dope, of how I would be sweating from the drugs when it was cold outside. I saw people on the street and knew that those were the things they were doing. I felt so sad for them. My desire is that no addict has to live that way. I wish that everyone knew there is a way out. Life is possible, and even great, without drugs. I was so grateful and happy to be doing the "mom" thing and picking up the kids, getting them safely home.

Since being home, I have painted my living room, replaced our bedroom furniture, redecorated the bathroom, and gotten a new dog! I am slowly turning our house into a home. My husband may not agree with all my changes, but I guess he understands that I need to nest and make it my own home again. He has been a really good sport about it, even though it has been an inconvenience to him. He is great.

I am so grateful for the program of Narcotics Anonymous for giving me a life I never thought was possible. The promise of this program is that, "...any addict can stop using, lose the desire to use drugs, and find a new way of life." The blessings that come from living this program are too many to list. But losing the desire to use drugs is blessing enough for me.

M, California, USA



“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 20-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*.
- I want to purchase _____ 20-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$31.00 each, total \$ _____.

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