

Reaching Out



Volume 26, Number 2

April 2011

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From the Editor

Welcome to Reaching Out! Whether you are experiencing recovery on the inside or on the outside, this NA World Services newsletter is for you. As our literature says, "The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel." Reaching Out is designed to help incarcerated addicts connect to the NA program and enhance H&I efforts.

There are two sections; "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. In the second section, "From the Outside," NA members on the outside and Hospitals & Institutions subcommittees have a chance to offer their experience, strength, and hope. Many of these letters come from members who are deeply committed to 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 addiction. Thank you for helping us carry our message of hope! Send all submissions to Reaching Out; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to HandI@na.org.

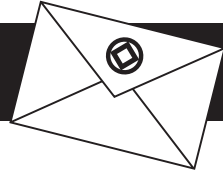
We recently developed worksheets to help our readers contribute to *Reaching Out*. On page 13, this issue features a tool for incarcerated addicts who want to share their stories. On page 12, we offer a similar tool designed for H&I members who found NA on the inside and are now maintaining their recovery on the outside. These new *Reaching Out* tools are also available on our website:

http://www.na.org/?ID=reaching_out-index

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
July 2011	15 April 2011
October 2011	15 July 2011
January 2012	15 October 2011
April 2012	15 January 2012

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JA and I'm an addict. I'm in a rehab center where I found NA. My first NA meeting was inspirational. I saw other addicts dealing with problems like mine, but living clean in recovery.

The NA message that's helping me the most is learning to let go of my past and live for today. I finally have some hope that I will live a better, brighter, clean tomorrow. This program has really opened my eyes to see that I am not in recovery alone, nor do I have to do it alone ever again.

My NA support group is my new family. It means that I'm stepping up to recovery and joining hands with the fellowship and becoming a stronger human being!

JA, TX

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is TLF and I'm an addict. I'm back behind the walls again for trying to satisfy the appetite of my addiction, a task I've tried countless times. I keep looking for a way to use drugs successfully while managing a productive life, and I've come to the conclusion that it can't be done.

I attended my first NA meeting when I was paroled after my last incarceration. I had a list of meetings in my local area and thought it would be a good idea to start things out on a positive note, so I went.

The warm welcome I received and the kindness that was shown to me were something I had never experienced. Because I had been around so much negativity in prison, it felt strange to be around people who genuinely cared about me staying clean.

When those old familiar feelings of wanting to use resurfaced, I remained silent and didn't tell anyone. My inability to share my true feelings and be honest with myself and others not only closed the door of recovery, it gave me a first-class ticket back to active addiction and prison.

I understand today that going to meetings regularly, getting a sponsor, and working the steps are fundamental keys to living a

life of recovery. But I have also learned that it's important not to be afraid to share honestly and openly with my sponsor and NA family.

I didn't know it at the time, but there was a recovering addict in the NA program who saw something in me that I couldn't see in myself. This friend has remained in contact with me, sharing the NA message, for over five years since I've been locked up. Now that I'm being honest and open, working the Twelve Steps, and living a life of recovery on the inside, a sense of serenity and hope has reentered my life.

I'm eternally grateful to NA and to other addicts for reaching beyond the walls of incarceration and showing me that recovery is a reality. I thank God for directing me to NA, and thank NA for directing me back to God.

TLF, IL

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JM and I am an addict. I currently reside in prison. My membership in NA began in April 1994. Since that date I have not used anything. That is not to say that I have not engaged in illegal acts; I have. My emotional state is what kept me thinking like an active addict, even in my recovery.

With over 16 years clean, I am here to tell you cleantime does not matter unless you are living the principles of recovery. The only difference between me and another addict who is locked up is that I strung together a few more 24 hours than they did. That's all, nothing more.

Recently, I was in a meeting at this facility and I just wanted to hear another addict speak honestly about what it means to be clean while being locked up. That prompted me to try to be more honest. Here, we live with constant fear of someone snitching if you talk about using while locked up.

It felt good to be honest about how I felt about the use of chemicals in this facility. I spoke of the alleged use, the alleged sale, and the alleged addiction to drugs; my sharing was full of the word "alleged." I kept stating that this was speculation, because that had to be said in order to keep anyone from coming back and saying that I had knowledge of any illegal acts. My point is that there is a way to share in prison. There is a way to talk about the alleged use, the alleged sale, and the REALITY of addiction behind the walls.

My hope is that when I am transferred away from this pretrial facility, sharing will be much simpler. I am trying to be a man who means what he says, and says what he means. No one can take my beliefs away, just like no one can take my cleantime from me. My greed took my freedom from me, and that is why I am here. Staying honest and humble helps me remain grounded in recovery.

Remaining sane in an insane setting is taxing, but I accept responsibility for my actions. With the knowledge that NA has given me, I will make it. I will keep writing to *Reaching Out* to let you know how recovery works on the inside. Good luck to all of you. Let's try to open up in meetings, even if we have to use the word "alleged" more often.

JM, IL

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is D and I am an addict. I have been clean for a little over two years on the inside. It took a lot of misery and the grace of my Higher Power for me to get where I am today. My first NA meeting was overwhelming. I felt like I was on a stage, under a spotlight, being watched by hundreds of people. I was humbled, but welcomed.

My recovery is still new even though I have some time clean. I am working the steps and learning about myself. I know NA has changed me. I used to just exist; now I have a life again. Thanks to this program, I have hope, faith, and confidence in my recovery.

Being an NA member means I am part of a family. We understand each other and uplift each other. I am grateful to have a second chance at life, thanks to NA!

DB, IN

Dear *Reaching Out*,

In 2010, I was sent to prison. I will be spending about two years locked up. I went to prison with over six years clean, without relapsing. I was attending meetings regularly and doing service work, but I stopped working on my personal recovery. I didn't change deep down, and now I know that is what I need to do. Today I see what people mean when they say recovery is an inside job.

I remain clean today and my goal is to have eight years clean when I am released in early 2012. I attend H&I meetings and share

about the shame I feel about going to prison clean. Today, I realize that recovery is not just about staying clean. Of course, staying clean has to come first, but recovery is about *living* the Twelve Steps in your daily life.

Thanks to the service of other NA members, I hope to work the steps while I'm inside.* I want to go home with the tools I need to stay clean *and* stay out of prison. I want to live my life according to what this program is all about—and become honest, open-minded, and willing.

M, CA

**Editor's note: Inmate step-writing committees (sometimes called Sponsorship Behind the Walls) are becoming more common in the NA Fellowship. If you are interested, contact your local H&I subcommittee or prison addiction services department to find out if this resource is available in your state/province!*

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict and my name is JO. I've been incarcerated for three years, due to my actions while in active addiction. I started using drugs at twelve years old, and it progressed for nine more years until I finally got handed a prison sentence.

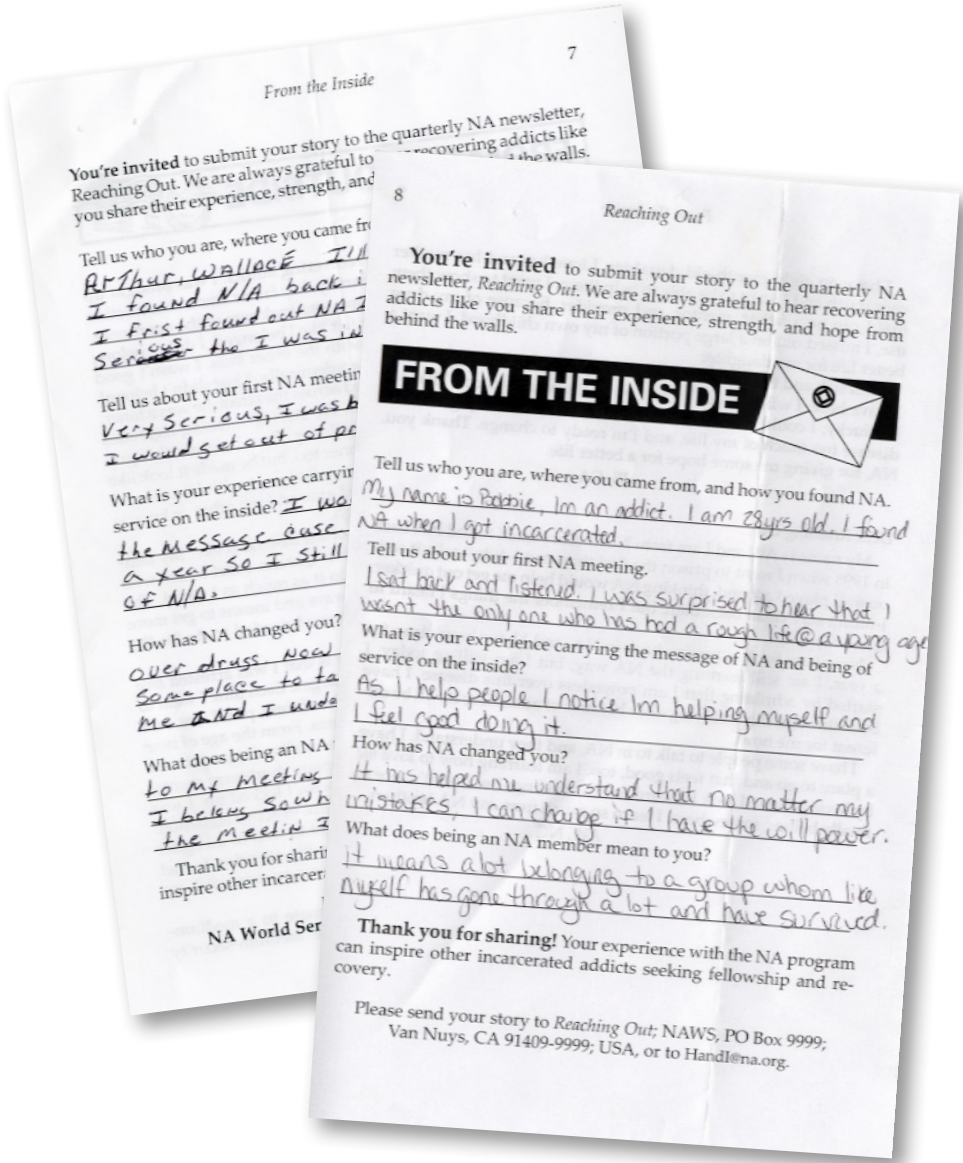
Prison, to me, was just what came with the territory. I never wanted to get locked up, but deep down I knew it was where I was heading. When I first got to prison, I still didn't want to get clean. I stayed that way for a while until I finally hit rock bottom in here. I was desperate and miserable. By the grace of what I now know as my Higher Power, one night a friend invited me to a meeting.

I'd been to NA before and I'd been to treatment plenty of times. It had never worked before. My problem was me, and I just wasn't ready to change. Something felt different this time. I was sick and tired, but I still didn't really want to go to this meeting. For some reason, however, I went. What I heard and saw that night stuck with me. Other men, in prison, were living and enjoying life! That gave me hope, and I kept coming back.

I'm scheduled to be released later this year. Because of what this program and the Twelve Steps have taught me, I am prepared to leave here with a newfound sense of purpose. I want to live a different life now.

I've already got my first meeting lined up and a temporary sponsor waiting on the outside. This program helped me get my life back and, for the first time, I'm truly living that life. I'll be forever grateful to my friend who was just trying to carry the message. Through Narcotics Anonymous and my Higher Power I've found freedom, even behind the walls.

JO, WA



FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict and my name is JC. I was introduced to the fellowship of NA at the age of 19 while I was in a treatment facility. At my first meeting, a guy celebrated two years clean. He was close to my age and that gave me hope that an addict like myself could get clean and stay clean.

After that meeting, I started to realize that I have a choice how to live my life. I realized that I don't have to feel hopeless if I do something about my problem. I don't have to be the next one of my friends to die. NA has given me hope to find a new way of life. After that meeting, the members made me feel welcome and included.

Today I am 30 years old and I have over ten years clean, thanks to this program. I am still an active member of NA and I owe all the good things in my life to this fellowship and the principles I learned in the steps. I cannot thank NA enough for saving my life. I know that if I can do it, anybody can.

Just for today, I never have to use again!

In loving service,
JC, NE

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RJ and I am an addict. Just recently I had the opportunity to read this magazine and was so jazzed that I thought I should give of myself, sharing my story. I am grateful for the blessings I have received through NA.

I started using at the ripe old age of nine years, and my disease progressed quickly. Active addiction went on for over 30 years except for the periods when I got locked up or diverted to drug programs. I found no good reason to stop using. Nothing could get in the way of my using. I was living to use and using to live, like our literature describes. Oh yes, I know the literature. H&I panels came through in one of many programs I was in. The seed was planted. I found a man in the rooms and made him my Higher Power, and there he stayed until we stuck poison back in our veins. He became the reason

and I hated him, but after being in the system this time, I no longer could blame him. For so many years I blamed others because it was more convenient to blame them. One day I looked in the mirror and there I stood.

We have one meeting a week here at this facility. I look forward to the meeting with great anticipation. The women here are sharing openly and honestly. We meet during the week as time permits. I look forward to getting back out there in society and putting my program to work. Thanks for letting me share.

RJ, NJ

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict named WH. I've had some of the most life-changing experiences being a panel leader for NA. Here is a little about why. I had to take outpatient treatment in order to get my children back. This facility is where my Higher Power took me to get help.

As a member of Narcotics Anonymous I got into service work. Hospitals & Institutions is my passion, and I was elected chair of an H&I committee. I had been asked by the treatment center I was in to come back and share my experience, strength, and hope when I had a year clean. It was a humbling experience. When I had communicated my story to the facility, the director asked if my H&I area service committee could start bringing in other speakers from NA to share to the patients.

My area has been bringing NA panels there now for four and a half years, and to see the hope of change come on their faces is amazing. It fills that spot in my heart when I see someone with whom I've shared my strength, hope, and experience come to meetings once they've been released and then stay clean. The love I have for this fellowship and the service structure is an amazing thing.

My gratitude goes out to the addicts who have paved the way. I'm a grateful recovering addict.

WH, NE

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RR; I am an addict. I fell for the first time at 49 years old in January 2001. I completed a 90-day sentence without any good time. My thinking was very clouded by drug use. I did realize that

my time could be hard because of my anger and resentments, or I could try to make it productive by trying to change my life. Having some previous exposure to NA, I was fortunate enough to be able to get involved with the NA meetings in the facility. I knew I had nothing to lose by attending those meetings.

I combined my recovery in NA with regular workouts on the yard and trying to eat as healthy as I could. I took the opportunity to start over, to be real, not try to be somebody I was not. I blossomed with new growth along a spiritual path that was paved for me by the members of the "Hole in the Wall" group of NA in the penitentiary. We benefited greatly from the support of NAWS as a resource for literature.

My first meetings were awkward because I had constructed an invisible barrier all around me. I was filled with self-loathing and despair. I was convinced that if you really knew me, you wouldn't accept me. Quickly I realized that I was not only welcome, but needed in the group. I was shocked to find a warm and loving environment in such a cold, hard place. Meetings made me feel free. I learned how to be myself through following the principles of NA.

Total abstinence was a good place to start my surrender. I got a sponsor inside and attended step meetings as I worked the steps. I took service positions and immersed myself in the loving fellowship of NA. They really did love me until I could love myself. I found a new way to live and was able to arrest my fatal disease and begin to recover.

I paroled with three years' probation and had nowhere to go. I ended up at a halfway house downtown on skid row. I was tested for drugs often. From day one on the outside I attended meetings; in fact, I hit two or three meetings a day for the first few months. I found another sponsor on the outside and focused on living in the moment and having faith that things would work out. It was tempting to run wild and play catch-up on the life, but just for today was my anchor.

I felt I was not of this world. I didn't know how to shop for food or clothes, navigate mass transit, or apply for county services. I was a stranger in a strange land. I hung with people in the fellowship and tried not to get angry because of the fear I felt over the challenges I was facing. After a while, I started renting a room from another NA member. When I thanked him for the opportunity, he told me that he "just liked to help out where he could." I was touched that

another member treated me with such basic human kindness. That single act helped me put down roots in society and in NA.

My focus in life became doing the next right thing. I continued my connection to NAWS through the publications and was fortunate to have the opportunity to tour the World Service Office on a trip to Southern California. I have been to several NA conventions and am always awed by the energy of many clean addicts. Today, hope burns bright.

I love the fellowship of NA. I am coming up on ten years clean in April, and I continue to try to carry the message of NA through my actions. The fellowship showed me how to get my life back, but I had to do the work. Today, I am happy and my foundation includes a Higher Power that I found through the steps. Everything may not be perfect, but I am fulfilled. I am still very active in NA because I know that no matter how long I stay clean, I am just one bad decision away from the old insanity. I stay in the middle with my brothers and sisters who are part of my NA family. For all that Narcotics Anonymous has done for me, I am forever grateful.

RR, OR

Dear *Reaching Out*,

H&I is my life saver! Not too long ago I was sitting in jail, waiting to be sentenced for distribution, while my newborn son was waiting for me on the outside. Getting clean in jail was really hard at first. Learning how to feel emotions again was almost too much to comprehend. I was faced with the consequences of my actions, and I thought I was close to a mental breakdown.

Narcotics Anonymous brought a panel to the jail I was in, and it was a godsend for me. I was given a Basic Text, and that book answered so many of my questions it was unbelievable. The more I read, the more overwhelming the serenity I felt.

I avoided going to prison through a recovery program, and as soon as I got out of jail I started to attend NA meetings on a regular basis. The man who brought that panel into the jail is my sponsor today.

This program has changed my life in so many ways, and I feel that H&I is where I belong. By doing service, I hope to show people who are learning how to feel again that there is hope out there and NA can help. I am a grateful addict named D, and H&I saved my life!

D, NE

H&I MEMBERS

You're invited to submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We are looking for the experience of NA members, like you, whose recovery has been enhanced by working with addicts who are seeking recovery behind the walls. Tell us about your H&I service experience, past and present.



Why did you get involved with H&I? _____

How has H&I impacted your recovery? _____

Do you have a particular H&I experience you would like to share?

What is one thing you would say to the addicts on the inside?

Thank you for sharing! Your experience with the NA program can inspire other addicts seeking fellowship and recovery.

Please send your story to:
Narcotics Anonymous World Services;
PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409,
or HandI@na.org

To download a pdf of this worksheet, go to
http://www.na.org/?ID=reaching_out-index.

ART FROM THE INSIDE

Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented art. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act, and images provide a powerful message of the freedom we can find in NA.



By Ricky O, Corcoran, California

If you would like to see your art printed here, please send jpegs or pdf files to HandI@na.org or mail to: *Reaching Out*; c/o NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409.

FROM THE INSIDE



Tell us who you are, where you came from, and how you found NA. _____

Tell us about your first NA meeting. _____

What is your experience carrying the message of NA and being of service on the inside? _____

How NA has changed you? _____

What does being an NA member mean to you? _____

Thank you for sharing! Your experience with the NA program can inspire other addicts seeking fellowship and recovery.

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“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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