

Reaching Out



Volume 27, Number 2

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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.

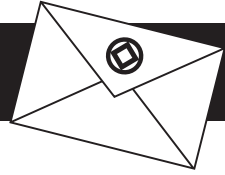
Share your gratitude in *Reaching Out*! We need letters from members who found NA on the inside and are now maintaining their recovery on the outside. If this is you, or you have a heart-warming H&I story, please share your experience, strength, and hope. This issue features a worksheet on page 14 designed to help our members contribute. Additional *Reaching Out* tools are available on our website:

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

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
July 2012	15 April 2012
October 2012	15 July 2012
January 2013	15 October 2012
April 2013	15 January 2013

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is DH and I am currently incarcerated in Queensland, Australia. I have spent most of my adult life in prison. I am about to turn 41. Most of my crimes have been committed while I was loaded.

I found NA in prison and was amazed to discover so many people I could relate to. NA got me to start opening up about my problems. Because of NA, I realized that my using had a lot to do with abuse I suffered as a child. I have a fear of sleeping. I would stay awake for days and days because of a deep-rooted terror that came from people touching me in my sleep when I was young. Because NA made me feel it was safe to be honest, I have been able to seek help from a specialist.

I am looking forward to attending NA meetings once I am on the outside. I have made many good friends in these rooms. I am only locked up for a short stint this time and I can finally look forward to a positive future. I am really over living in the gutter. I want to stay clean and help others. There is a really bad drug problem where I come from. I want to be able to help others recover from this deadly disease.

DJH, Australia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name isn't important. What is important is the fact that I am an addict and I know it.

I've been in recovery since 1 January 1995. I got clean in Southern California, but found my NA home in Sinaloa, Mexico. My first year clean was a gift. In my second year, I struggled for a bit. I made it and I owe it all to my sponsor. He is the best example of integrity I have ever met. I remember when I first got clean; I thought I knew it all! I was fresh out of the penitentiary after doing a little stretch.

My sponsor told me to do 90 meetings in 90 days. He said to sit down, shut up, and try listening for the first 90 days because I didn't have any recovery to share. I chose my sponsor because he was

hardcore. He was like me, but clean. He was serious about his recovery and expected the same from me. He didn't have the time to (like he says) "babysit" me.

After my first 90 days, I wanted to start working the steps. My sponsor told me to read Step One every day for 30 days without missing a day. After I completed the 30 days, I told him I did it and I was ready to start writing. He told me to read Step One again every day for 30 days. I flipped out!

I used foul words and told him, "You said after I read it for 30 days, I would start writing!" He just smiled and said, "No, I said you would start writing when you are ready; you are not ready." He told me to look at the way I was acting just because I didn't get my way. He explained that I needed to learn how to accept life on life's terms. He said that before I could walk through this life, I needed to learn how to crawl. After that, I learned to keep my mouth shut and trust him.

After 16 years in recovery, I was at a spiritual standstill. It seemed like every door I reached for slammed in my face. Nothing was going right in my life. I couldn't figure out what was wrong, so I asked my sponsor for help. He said to talk to my Higher Power to find the answer.

I was sitting in a meeting when it hit me like a slap in the face. The spiritual principles of honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are the basics of our way of life. I was struggling because I wasn't being honest. I needed to get back to the basics—shame on me. With 16 years clean and living in Mexico, I had to face the fact that I was wanted on charges in the USA.

I knew I couldn't live anymore without honesty, so I turned myself in. I had to finally face the music. I was sentenced to 32 months incarceration and three years parole. Now I'm doing my program on the inside and I feel great about myself. Unfortunately, I lost my address book while I was in the county jail. Without the support of my NA friends, I feel like it is just me and my Higher Power. But I know that because of NA, I am never alone. I'm just another addict who loves NA—just for today.

HT, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I just finished reading the "From the Inside" section of the July 2011 issue again. My gratitude is so overwhelming that I thought I would stop procrastinating (a major character defect of mine) and share my heart's feelings. I reached out to you 13 years ago, when I first began this sentence of 19 years. I had just lost the use of my right arm because of a gunshot wound. I was in pain and dealing with nerve damage, and I didn't know how to do time without using.

I had stayed high during previous sentences, never willing to deal with the pain. I never changed. I'm a hardheaded addict. This time, I went to NA meetings when they were available. I received a blessing when I found out about *Reaching Out*. I reached out to you and got a subscription. You have been sending me a copy every three months for my entire sentence. Through *Reaching Out*, you have shared with me the importance of meetings, sponsorship, and applying the spiritual principles of the steps in all areas of my life... and I'm talking all areas.

When I embraced the principles, I experienced a spiritual awakening. It is not just the dope I am powerless over, it is people, places, and things. I am powerless over the correctional officers; I used to give them the power to dictate how I spent my time. I would act out and end up isolated. I was clean but still caught up in self, paying consequences for my behavior. Through other addicts sharing in *Reaching Out*, I learned there was a different way.

It took a while, but when I started doing step work my life got better. My family saw the changes in me and it made their time easier. You see, my family does every day of my sentence with me. Thanks to NA and doing what was suggested, I made honor grade in 2008. This meant I was granted the privilege of going to outside meetings twice a week. I was granted work release in June of 2011, but I haven't started work due to the job market and my disability.

NA and my fellow addicts have helped me with acceptance. You have taught me that when my acceptance level drops, my serenity decreases, and I can revert back to self-centeredness very quickly. I am grateful to have meetings and spiritual principles. I have 13 months left of my sentence. Addicts like you have shared your experience and strength, giving me the hope I needed. We made it through my sentence together. The way I want to show my appreciation is to let my gratitude speak. I will carry the message to the addict who still suffers, just like you did for me. Thanks, *Reaching Out!*

ML, NC

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Today I am in prison, yet I feel more freedom inside than ever before. I was raised in the juvenile department of corrections. This is where I learned what I thought it meant to be a man. Being locked up, I have attended meetings my whole life. I didn't go for recovery and I didn't relate. Now I realize I had yet to experience life as a true addict.

Several times I have been out on parole and I would try to make up for lost time. I threw away my freedom over the things I thought life was about, only to find myself alone and suffering again. I tried suicide because I thought the whole world was out to get me. I thought I had no choice. Looking back, it makes me laugh.

When I came back to prison this time, I was determined to change—to do it differently this time. It wasn't easy. I found myself caught up in yard drama and in segregation, same ol' same ol'. As soon as I had the chance, I signed up for NA meetings. I just wanted to get out of my cell for an hour a week. When I got there, I saw people who I have done time with; I had known some of them for years.

They weren't the same. The things they spoke of, I wanted. They were open and honest and I could relate with everything they said. I felt a change in me while I was at meetings. Just sitting in the group helped me keep my goal in perspective. I kept coming back and stayed out of the drama. Something was working and I felt an inner push, so I spoke up.

Maybe it was my Higher Power, but I finally shared. I made a commitment out loud to myself to be real and give this thing we call NA an honest go. To do that, I needed to do some step work. Before I could get started, I chose a sponsor who I felt I could trust. Trust was impossible for me, so this was huge!

Today, I have worked all twelve steps and I live them every day of my life. I sponsor people and I make an effort to better myself spiritually. I have a new outlook on life, which is a huge accomplishment. I live just for today. It is difficult to describe my inner change, so I will quote Step Ten from *The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*:

“Working the Tenth Step makes it possible for us to achieve more balance and harmony in our lives. We find that we're happy and serene much more often than not. Feeling out of sorts becomes so rare that, when it does happen, it's a signal that something is wrong. We

can readily identify the cause of our discomfort by taking a personal inventory.

“The personal freedom that has been building since we began working the steps yields an increase in our choices and options. We have total freedom to create any kind of life we want for ourselves. We begin to look for the meaning and purpose in our lives. We ask ourselves if the lifestyle we have chosen helps the still-suffering addict or makes the world a better place in some other way. What we are searching for, we’ll find in the Eleventh Step.”

The steps of NA have changed me. Before, I could not have imagined the selflessness and compassion I feel today for my fellow addicts. I never experienced humility and acceptance until I worked the steps. Today, I have the knowledge to deal with my emotions. I am a person I like for the first time in my life! By working the program, I lost nothing but the defects I chose to change.

Being a member of NA means I have a life, one I choose, love, and embrace. I am now thankful for all the things in my life I once took for granted. NA has woken me up. I’ve grown emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially. Today, I have true friends.

Those of us in prison know we can get high in here if that’s what we choose. NA gave me the tools to say “no” and the self-respect I need to continue life the NA way. Today, recovery works because I live it!

Thank you,

LH, OR

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I’m an addict called W. I spend each day celebrating recovery and struggling to dig my way out of the mess I have made. If you are reading this, chances are you have been there. I first found NA in rehab, but I felt like it was a joke. I wasn’t ready. I continued down the path of self-destruction and ended up in prison...twice.

I finally hit my bottom and now I write this from within the confines of razor wire. I was reintroduced to NA and I feel like this is my last chance. I don’t think I have another recovery left in me. It may sound crazy, but in the midst of this dysfunction, I am healing.

My experience being of service to NA on the inside has brought me joy, satisfaction, and some sadness. Being able to give back is beauti-

ful. Watching my peers struggle is bittersweet, and when they heal, I heal. Today I am becoming a better person, thanks to the guidance of my Higher Power and the help of my NA family.

W, IN

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm 42 years old. I've been in prison for the last 21 years because I killed someone over drugs. I was born and raised in Southern California. When I first came to NA it was because the parole board said I needed NA before they would consider me for parole.

I thought it was a joke. When I saw all these dudes talkin' about their feelings and telling their stories, I thought, "Why can't you be like me and get clean and stay clean on your own?" I've come to find out that sometimes it ain't that easy. It turns out that it makes me feel good to talk about NA, and try to help someone. It's really easy to get discouraged in here because most people say they want change in their life, but they're not really willing to change. NA has shown me that I'm not alone, and I don't have to do this all alone.

I realized I can change in NA with the help of my sponsor. Working with him has given me the tools to stay clean, the desire to stay clean, and willingness to help others with their problems. Being a member means I belong to something bigger than myself. I know I can lean on people for help and they'll be there for me. I enjoy being around like-minded people who are trying to help each other in NA.

BM, CA

To: The Executive Staff at a CA State Prison
From: A Narcotics Anonymous Group

We would like to take this opportunity to THANK YOU for approving our involvement in the NA World Unity Day phone link*. It was held on 4 September 2011; 133 phone connections took place, with more than 40 prisons participating worldwide! It was announced that California was the only state to have all 33 state institutions participate in this event. It gave us hope that there are those who believe that we can change and become better people.

One of our local NA volunteers had spoken to us about this event in our regular meeting. He attended the event in person. When he got home, he told us it was amazing to hear our group given a shout-out. It was great to hear all the inspirational speakers who spoke from their experiences in the hope of giving others the courage to change their lives.

The main speaker talked about love, care, and recovery. He talked about the fear of addiction and the hope of recovery and reminded us that anyone can change. He shared how hard it is to stay drug-free without a good support system ready to assist you when you find yourself in need. He told all of us to take it one day at a time, that we did not become addicts overnight, and that it will take time to heal. He said it does not make you a lesser man to admit you have a problem, but a stronger one.

All of us who have participated in the NA group have realized that our addiction has played a role in our being here. Knowing that other people have taken the time to understand and help gives us hope that one day life can be different for us.

In conclusion, our group would again like to THANK everyone who contributed to this wonderful experience. We appreciate your continued assistance with the self-help programs here in the state prison.

LD, RP, & SB, CA

* Please see footnote on Page 11.

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

Last night I went to prison one more time, for exactly two hours. A new H&I representative brought me in for his first time. He did not remember me. To him, I was just one more name on the clearance list. Then I reminded him that I brought him in for his very first time back in 2004 and now the shoe was on the other foot.

Whenever my Higher Power takes me to do H&I in this particular prison, it is special. I saw it from the inside for the first time in July 1975, facing a five-years-to-life sentence. When I go back, I am always overwhelmed by gratitude that comes with the knowledge that I will be in and out the same evening.

As usual, I shared about how important it is to go to a meeting on the first day out. I spoke about the World Unity Day phone link* as well. I shared about how now, more than any time in history, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is committed to making NA accessible to incarcerated addicts.

There were three men in the meeting who had transferred from other institutions and had had the opportunity to participate in the World Unity Day phone link. They talked about how their connection to NA solidified as a result of being on that call. One man talked about not being able to go to the room where the call was being broadcast. He said that he was disappointed to miss the call, but that just knowing it was happening strengthened his connection to NA.

That man had been locked up for over 16 years. He spoke about his resolve to stay clean on the inside until he gets released in two or three years. He also spoke about the hope that H&I meetings have given to him. I sat there and listened, reflecting upon how easily our situations could have been reversed. Then I quietly thanked my Higher Power for the work he has given me to do in Narcotics Anonymous.

On the way home, I stopped for a solitary dinner at one of my favorite Mexican restaurants. That giant veggie burrito tasted much better than it would have if I had wolfed it down in the 45 minutes before the meeting. Instead of hurrying through dinner before the

meeting, I took a little extra time to pray and meditate. I believe that helped me come from a place of humility when I shared my simple message of recovery from addiction and institutionalization.

As I drove home, I called a dear friend to wish him well. He was celebrating 30 years in Narcotics Anonymous. It turned out that he had just gotten home from doing his H&I commitment at the county jail. We laughed at the coincidence and agreed on how fortunate we were to have more than 50 years of recovery between the two of us.

My friend and I talked about how fitting it was that we were able to have those blessed moments where we got to see the light come on in somebody's eyes at those H&I meetings. I could write more, but it would not explain the feeling of being right in my heart and in my soul. All I can say is "THANK YOU, NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS."

Forever circled with love & hugs,

JR

** At each World Convention of NA, institutions and NA areas are invited to join in via phone link in the celebration of recovery. This unique event allows members around the world—on the inside and on the outside- to hear the readings and speakers at the closing meeting of WCNA, which is our "Unity Day" celebration. This is an opportunity to make a connection to the worldwide NA Fellowship and hear the powerful message of recovery.*

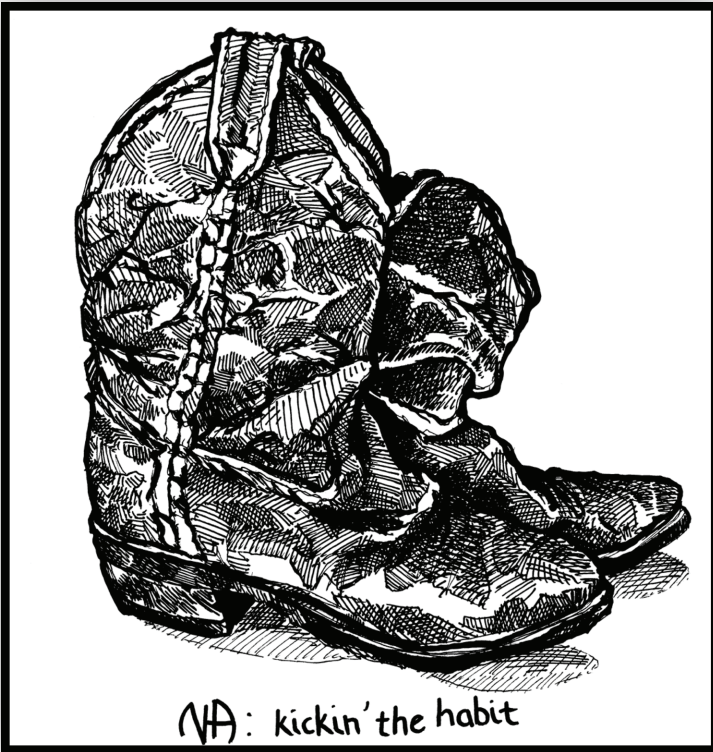
Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented art. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act, and images provide a powerful message of the freedom we can find in NA.



Grupo Nueva Amanecer, MEX

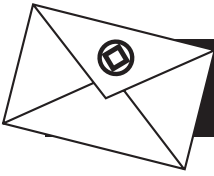
THE OUTSIDE

ART FROM



BK, NE

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.**



INSIDE / OUTSIDE

CALLING ALL 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 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. If you are an incarcerated addict whose life has been touched by an H&I volunteer, please give them this form and tell them we need their story for *Reaching Out*!

Why did you get involved with H&I? _____

How has H&I had an impact on 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.



“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 \$32.60 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* @ \$32.60 each, total \$ _____.

Name _____
(PLEASE type or print clearly)

Identification Number _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Country _____

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