

Reaching Out

April 2014



As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NA

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Reaching Out is the beginning of the struggle that will set us free. It will break down the walls that imprison us. A symptom of our disease is alienation, and honest sharing will free us to recover.

Basic Text, "Recovery and Relapse"

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.

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
July 2014	15 April 2014
October 2014	15 July 2014
January 2015	15 October 2014
April 2015	15 January 2015



From the Inside

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is CR and I am a grateful recovering addict. I haven't always been grateful, or in recovery, for that matter. Throughout my 17-year journey as a practicing addict I made it to some of the deepest and darkest places one could ever think to venture. I dug myself a hole so deep that the darkness was the only thing that I found comforting to me anymore, and I absorbed myself in it. When I made the ultimate decision to finally put that shovel down and stop digging, physically I had been worn down, emotionally I was numb, and spiritually I was bankrupt. I had lost all hope for the future, and given up on life. My addiction had totally consumed me!

One Saturday morning I was walking to the big yard for a jog. As I approached a side building, I noticed a door that was open that I had never seen open before. A friend of mine who I was walking with noticed the direction I was gazing in. He made a very simple and soft-spoken statement: "If you want to find happiness, head through that door." So as I sat there, tucked into the corner of an overly crowded room, in a building that was constructed well over 100 years prior and that had housed some of the most notorious criminals this country has ever known, I found myself attending my first NA meeting. I listened to some of the guys share their experience, strength, and hope. Not only was I was moved, I was also intrigued by some of the messages that I heard.

As the last speaker of the morning wrapped up his message, he looked over at me with a pair of eyes so intense, not blinking or wavering an inch, it gave me the feeling that he was staring directly into my soul. As he began to speak, it seemed as if we were the only two in the room. So I knew that he was talking directly to me when he said, "This is a very simple program. All you have to change is everything!"

At the time, so very young in recovery, I thought that what he said was the most absurd thing that I had ever heard. I knew that there were things about me that I needed to change, but there were things about me that I loved, that others loved, and things that I was not willing to change. My morals and values at the time centered on a belief system that I thought to be one of honor, one of principle, and certainly, one of the utmost integrity!

As I look back now, many years and several hundred meetings later, I realize just how wrong, how selfish, and how self-centered I truly was. I've actually had to change EVERYTHING about me. By no means was this an easy task, and it most certainly did not happen overnight or by working the Twelve Steps only one time. Regardless of how long this transformation took or how many steps I had to work, by living a program of recovery in my everyday life I was able to make some of these drastic and much-needed changes actually stick.

Maybe the greatest aspect of this program was when I came to the realization that my belief system, the very thing I swore by and that I would live and die for, was morally corrupt. Not a belief system of a productive member of society by any means, but one of a severely suffering addict, and one of a criminal and a con artist.

Through recovery I was introduced to the real me and given a second chance at life. Now, as I continue to work this amazing program into my everyday life, I am constantly rewarded with all of the profound and meaningful little miracles that continuously come as a result of my hard work and dedication. My whole attitude and outlook on life have changed significantly—and for the better. I am still a man of great principle, and I am grateful that this vital aspect of me has not changed. I am also still a man who holds his values, his morals, and his integrity to the highest regard, only now the standards I hold stay true to me, and not true to the code of the streets! I am able to hold intelligent conversations and interact with people in a positive and productive manner. Recovery has shown me the true meaning of happiness. I am now able to understand and grasp the concept of living life

on life's terms. I fully embrace this aspect of the program, and have been blessed to experience a truly purpose-driven lifestyle, even if it is only one day at a time!

CR, WA

Dear Reaching Out,

G'day from Australia. My name is JK and I am an addict. I'm currently serving time in a correctional complex. I have been in the program for over two months, and I'm so grateful. Before I go any further, I wish to mention that prior to my arrest and ending up in prison *again*, I struggled over the years to give up using. I tried and tried in so many ways, going into detoxes and rehabs, changing cities, changing countries, etc. No matter what I did, one way or another I ended up using again and again. I was always loaded or concerned with getting loaded soon. I was always on the brink of panic in case my supply ran out. I was always obsessed with myself—self-centered and living a narrow but intense life. In a way it was a form of clarity. Always with no self-esteem, with low self-worth, a loser, I lived to use and used to live. Today I sit in my cell and say to myself that I was truly blessed to have been arrested, and I know the handcuffs saved my life. I was only inches away from death, living on the borderline.

This time in prison, I was willing to do anything to stay clean. That's how I found myself in the program, and what a wonderful program it is. For the first time in my life, I was introduced to the program of NA. Wanting to stay clean, I embraced it to the best of my ability. Today I can proudly say I'm three months clean and I choose to live without drugs, thanks to NA. The fellowship has awakened me and my spirit. The other day, for the first time, I attended an outside NA meeting. An officer took me and another inmate to that meeting. It was amazing just leaving the prison, and I am grateful to the officer for escorting us to the meeting. I was taken aback by the unconditional acceptance and support I experienced at the meeting. I ended up sharing. I was so nervous and scared at first, but once I started talking, I was amazed at how everyone in the room listened to me and

supported me through my share. What an amazing experience. When the meeting finished, I couldn't comprehend what I was hearing from my fellow addicts. One by one they came up to me, thanked me for sharing, and told me that I inspired them to be stronger.

Wow!!! What a feeling! ME, a drug addict, locked up in prison, inspiring people on the outside. At that very moment I had tears in my eyes. I was speechless but filled with all kinds of emotions. All I can remember is them telling me to stay strong because there is life after prison. Wow. NA rules!

Finally, I want to give thanks to Andrew and the rest of the team for introducing me to Reaching Out. You guys rock this world. And to my fellow inmates around the world, we have already given this disease too much of our lives. Give NA a go . . . it works. We never have to go to jail again. Love you all, my brothers and sisters.

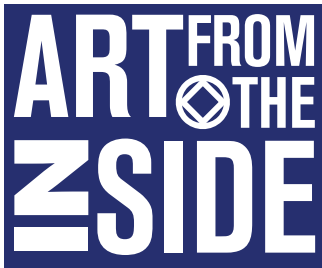
JK, Australia

Dear Reaching Out,

I am JV. I am writing to you to share my experience that I had on the inside. One day I was talking to another inmate. I shared that I didn't know my next move because I was about to leave for a recovery house in three weeks. I went back to my cell and prayed for help in my faith in a Higher Power. When I got to the recovery house I talked to a counselor, and I started going to NA meetings. I was doing good, but after I was in there for 3½ months I got into a fight and they told me I had to leave. I was supposed to go back to court to see if the judge might give me one more chance, but I didn't go. I waited for a month before turning myself in, and when I went to court I was facing nine years. But when the judge asked me if I had stayed clean for those 3½ months, I told her, "Yes; I don't want to use drugs anymore and I want to change my life, so before I turned myself in I stayed out of the streets and away from the people that the program tells us about." Instead of the nine years, she sentenced me to only 2½ years.

I was going to NA meetings before I turned myself in, and now I want to share with you about my life today. I had become stagnant in my recovery. I want to be careful not to allow my ego to get in the way of my recovery because I have been using drugs for 25 years and I lost everything that I had known. I want to give back to the newcomer and practice being open-minded. I am happy that I am clean, and I want to find a sponsor as soon as I get out. I am 55 years old and I want to make my sons, granddaughters and grandson, and family happy. I want to feel good, be clean, and help other addicts like me.

Thank you very much,
JV, CT



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.

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





From the Outside

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is MT and I am an addict. My first experience with H&I was in a 28-day rehab (nice word for mental institution) over 18 years ago. Every Sunday evening a male and female NA member—in the spirit of unity—carried the message of hope and freedom to the people in the facility. Each week my interest and willingness grew: I slowly moved from the back to the middle to the front row. Eventually, despite my paranoia, shame, and terror, I found the courage to raise my hand and try to express myself. About six months later, my sponsor asked me to share at the same rehab. I felt ashamed of my sexuality, had been recently diagnosed HIV-positive, and still harbored resentment for a counselor there. I always knew how to use humor to mask my pain. Sadly, I thought I was charming; the residents were laughing at my silly jokes. But my sponsor told me addiction is a life-or-death matter and I need to remember my primary purpose when asked to serve our fellowship.

So, with ten months clean I joined the Manhattan Area H&I Subcommittee. I was trained by two members, purchased the *H&I Handbook*, and served as a panel leader for many years. I helped coordinate our annual learning days and revise our area policy. I loved being of service in the spirit of anonymity. I visited various groups, areas, and regions to actively listen for members who reflected the diversity of our fellowship to carry our life-saving message. H&I became an instrument to put my Twelfth Step into action. Then, when I had 13 years clean, I served for one year as New York Regional H&I vice chair. I worked with members from the different areas in New York state and learned about their challenges, needs, and struggles in trying to help other addicts. We had annual learning days, which helped to educate our members about H&I work. I continue to share my experience, strength, and hope in AIDS hospices, detoxes, homeless shelters,

inpatient programs, jails, men's facilities, outpatient programs, serving stations, therapeutic communities, and work-release programs—in the spirit of unconditional love.

Through my sponsor I got involved with H&I service. I wanted what she had to offer, and she led by example. She encouraged me to get and maintain an NA service commitment. I appreciated the selflessness of H&I members and was grateful for their willingness to help others stay clean without the need for approval or recognition. The energy and spirit of H&I members inspired me to give back what was so freely given to me. I believed I could make a difference in the lives of other addicts through H&I work.

H&I service has impacted my recovery in many ways. H&I service has helped challenge my fears, insecurities, and shortcomings in my relationships with other people, inside and outside the fellowship. H&I service has helped me try to treat all people with kindness and respect. H&I service has helped me respect authority figures whose career paths I would normally feel envious and jealous toward. H&I service has helped me to look people in the eye without guilt or shame. H&I service has helped open my heart and mind to the suffering of people I wouldn't otherwise care about. H&I service has helped me remember what the disease wants me to forget. Being involved with H&I service has taught me to try to extend myself to other people, regardless of our differences, to try not to compromise my beliefs, morals, principles, and values no matter how I felt or who I was dealing with. H&I has taught me to neither defend nor promote NA, to expect conflict with others—inside and outside the fellowship—but also not to react to others' feelings or issues. I have learned to be assertive and not aggressive, to cooperate and not manipulate. I have learned to delegate and not dictate, to empathize and not criticize, to look inward for discontent and not judge others harshly. I have learned to not take myself morbidly seriously—besides, no one else does. I have learned to trust others' input and not control others' lives. I have learned to welcome personal responsibility, not worry about perfection, and to value (and not be a victim of) life on life's terms.

There is one particular H&I experience that I would like to share. A few years ago we carried the message to a facility in lower Manhattan. One of the residents was enthused about what we had to offer and promised to make an NA meeting as soon as he left the facility, as we suggested. Several months later, he recognized me in a meeting and was excited to see me. I couldn't remember where we had met and felt embarrassed, but nonetheless, he seemed genuinely happy to be making meetings, not using drugs, and being part of the NA Fellowship. Today, he's a proud member of the Bronx Area H&I Subcommittee. He attends learning days, serves his home group, and works the steps with his sponsor—who is also an H&I trusted servant. He is clean over two years and very enthusiastic to be a panel leader. In fact, his weekly service commitment is in one of the facilities where he was an unhappy resident. He now feels a personal responsibility to give back what was freely given to him. H&I planted the seed, and I'm happy to witness his growth.

One thing I would like to say to the addicts on the inside is that you never have to use drugs again. The NA program works, and we do recover. We learn to become productive members of society. I had thought that other people were responsible for my happiness, fulfillment, and success, but I was wrong. NA encourages us to realize our wildest dreams. My self-esteem has grown because I value helping others find a new way to live. I've learned to not blame others for my choices, feelings, and shortcomings. You cannot be free if you have hate in your heart. Compassion, forgiveness, and integrity are essential to my spiritual growth in Narcotics Anonymous.

MT, NY

Dear Reaching Out,

I am an addict and my name is NE. I was almost a dozen times in and out of jail before I completely surrendered. I had found the rooms after being released when I was 20 and stayed abstinent for a few years, but I really struggled with the concept of having the disease of addiction. I was convinced it was only a drug

problem. With no program in place, I went back out. It took me another ten years of using, with more jail sentences, before I had a real moment of clarity and I finally surrendered to the concept of having the “disease” of addiction.

With all that said, I felt I needed to write this letter. When I did finally commit to the principles of this program I wasn’t in jail or prison, but I felt a strong desire to give back to the places where I remember I felt the most worthless, lonely, and hopeless—jails. I got involved with H&I right away, but found out it would be a long time before I could go into the jails because of my past. That’s when I found out about *Reaching Out* and had to let all of you “on the inside” know that you have inspired me in a way I never thought possible. To stay clean in the places where it seems inconceivable to me takes a special type of courage and commitment. I hope and pray to see you share in the meetings someday soon.

This program can show us all how to live a life of freedom from this disease by sharing our experience, strength, and hope. Your strength and hope have taught me some deep lessons in patience. Waiting for outside members to carry the message, and planning your first days out with members you have connected with, inspires me. Because of your shared experiences, I have hope that someday I WILL be able to carry the message to the places I said I would never go back to. I know that the only people who would understand that kind of crazy thought are the family I have found in the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I hope you can get back from this letter some of the feelings of inspiration and courage that you have given me. I love and need every last one of you.

NE, Canada

Dear Reaching Out,

About 18 months ago, some NA volunteers were allowed to go into another Northern California Fire Camp, and initially it was not easy to deliver the message of recovery. The meeting place they allotted was a cold, greasy-floored concrete garage

with tools and vehicle fluids and just generally random, dirty garage stuff scattered everywhere. The meeting attendees were not interested and spared no chance to let us know that they resented being there.

We kept showing up and bringing the message, and after a period of time the guys began to soften to us and even began sharing some of their reservations. Soon the facility began letting us meet outdoors in an open-air, parklike setting under the redwoods. As the meeting locale became more beautiful and appealing, so too did the meeting attendees' attitudes. After a year or so, we began hearing addicts telling us what they had to do upon release so they could stay clean. I heard guys who had a dozen times told me they didn't have or need a Higher Power now telling me their HP was leading them on their journey. We watched as the group began holding their own meetings on days when we were not scheduled to be there. We saw the same guys who formerly resented us beginning to lead their group, which included up to three in-house meetings per week, while at every opportunity requesting more literature and visits from our subcommittee. They handcrafted a beautiful literature box, smooth wood with linseed oil finish and marked with the NA logo. We heard them brag to us when they got letters back from the Sponsorship by Mail program, and we saw guys leave after spending months setting up their "aftercare" programs, willingly heading into different recovery houses as they paroled. They asked us for local schedules for the service areas they were heading home to. We showed up, and they showed us how to recover through Narcotics Anonymous.

The months tick by and the clients come and go from this camp. We show up and they help to keep us clean. The program that guides us to serve blossoms in the lives of the inmates. We who are allowed inside come away with the miracle fresh in our minds and the blessings of recovery evident in the lives of inmates who before had little chance of hearing the message.

For me there's no better message than the one presented by a guy who previously had nothing to say, then had bad stuff to say, then said the stuff that I had said, and then insisted that without NA he didn't stand a chance. I'm a miracle and I'm clean today because NA afforded me the opportunity to carry the message inside to guys who otherwise would never have had the chance to help me stay clean. Thank you, Narcotics Anonymous Fire Camp Subcommittee.

MT, CA

ART FROM THE INSIDE

Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented H&I T-shirts. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act and art. Please share your H&I T-shirt pictures with us! We would like to showcase your art. HandI@na.org





“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”

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 \$35.90 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* @ \$35.90 each, total \$ _____.

Name _____

Identification Number _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Country _____

Reaching Out

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