

Reaching Out



Volume 24, Number 1

January 2009

Welcome
PAGE 2

From the Inside
PAGE 3

From the Outside
PAGE 12

Order Form
PAGE 16

From the Editor

We would like to welcome all of you to the NA World Services newsletter, Reaching Out. We hope that the contents of this newsletter will assist you in your recovery or H&I efforts. There are two sections to Reaching Out. The first section, "From the Inside," is filled with letters from incarcerated addicts, sharing their experience, strength, and hope as they find and maintain recovery from addiction through NA.

The second section, "From the Outside," is an opportunity for Hospitals & Institutions subcommittees to offer their experiences obtained through carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the NA message on the inside and are now living and enjoying life on the outside.

We encourage submissions for Reaching Out from members and H&I subcommittees. Please consider that we are more likely to publish articles that focus on how NA has helped an individual to recover while incarcerated rather than those that concentrate on the horrors of drug use. Send all submissions to Reaching Out; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to fmail@na.org.

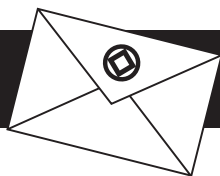
GET INVOLVED AND HELP US CARRY OUT OUR
FELLOWSHIP'S PRIMARY PURPOSE!!



Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

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

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict named MB, and I've been in active addiction eighteen years. I've abused alcohol and other drugs over half my life. What I didn't know was how the drugs were affecting my loved ones. I always thought I was only hurting myself, no one else—until I missed two of my daughters' birthdays and my son's birth and first birthday due to my using. It left me faced with jails, institutions, and even death. I've seen death, but it wasn't my time to go yet! In my insane state of mind, I jumped off a two-story balcony. I awoke with tubes going in and out of me due to my overdosing. This was still another reason for me to keep using. I was still only hurting myself, or so I thought. I hear of all sorts of bottoms we can hit before we realize we are at the bottom. You would think nearly experiencing death would have been my bottom. Still, I needed more drug abuse. That is the power and insanity of addiction. It controls us.

I am paying the consequences today. I'd rather say it saved my life and made me become open minded to my loved ones on the other end of the phoneline. This let me realize there is more to life than getting high. I've now accomplished fourteen months of cleantime with the help of NA. I've learned we only have to make it through today and, no matter what, if we have fourteen years or fourteen days, if we don't stay clean just for today, we have nothing. Also the NA way has given me suggestions on how to build a twelve-step ladder to climb out of the pit I was in. My Higher Power, God, helps me daily, not only with my addiction, but with my struggles while I am incarcerated. We have no NA meeting here, only the Basic Text and *Reaching Out*. I can only keep what I have by putting it in this letter and *Reaching Out*. I want to help another addict stay clean today with my experience. I am looking forward to the next *Reaching Out* and I thank all of you in my NA family. It works if you work it.

MB, West Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is Joe. I am currently serving a relatively small sentence again in jail in Australia. I am thirty-one years old and certainly not getting any younger as many of us may wish. My drug use started at the young age of thirteen after much physical and sexual abuse at the hands of my sister. My trouble had just begun; little did I realize that instead of escaping the abuse, I was actually starting a recurring abuse on myself.

By the time I was eighteen years old, petty crime and being kicked out of home took their toll. I found myself before a judge in court for several offenses. I was just about to experience withdrawal in a big way. I was using intravenously by then and with no help from the system or my family, I was lost and very scared. I met other people inside in the same boat, many a lot older. I didn't want this for myself and, after two years, I got out of jail and thought I'd do it on my own. That was my first mistake, thinking I could do it alone. I am hopefully in jail for the last time. Before this sentence I was seeking help from church groups and also attending NA every now and then. Unfortunately, I didn't commit myself as I should have.

Writing to you has uplifted me and has given me new hope for my release in seven months. I hope to contact NA locally where I will be living and I want to find a sponsor and build a foundation that I can grow from into the person I was born to be. I read the April 2008 edition of *Reaching Out* and it moved me. I wish we had NA meetings available in our system over here. It is very much needed. I look forward to a clean healthy life with help from NA.

Thank you,
JV, South Australia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is Doug and I am an addict. My drug of choice is "more." I suffer from a disease that tells me everyday that I don't have a disease. I'm addicted to everything that makes me feel good, feel different, and, most of all, not feel at all.

I'm currently serving my share of an eight-year prison sentence as a direct result of a four-year run of using, one of many symptoms of my disease. The Basic Text tells me using is only a symptom of the disease, so I think not using is only a symptom of my recovery. I know this to be true through my own experience.

I'm not grateful to be in prison, but I know it saved my life, as NA did twenty-one years ago. I am, however, grateful to be in a treatment program here that deals with thinking errors (addiction in all areas of life). I'm also grateful to be a member of Narcotics Anonymous and to be familiar with the program of NA, as well as for the two meetings a week I can and do attend here at this prison. I know NA works because I was clean for seventeen years. For fifteen years of that time I was working a good program of recovery. NA gave me strength, hope, and faith. During those last two years, all I did was not pick up.

Before that, my program of recovery consisted of many things. I had an NA sponsor who had an NA sponsor, who had an NA sponsor. I sponsored fellow addicts, went to lots of meetings, and I was very involved with service at the group and area level. I enjoyed and attended lots of NA functions (conventions, picnics, dances, campouts, etc). I worked the twenty-seven spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous, the Twelve Steps, and Twelve Traditions; and I practiced honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness to the best of my ability in my everyday life. I sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with a God of my understanding. I read the literature and even took the suggestions of other recovering addicts as the ultimate weapon against addiction. I humbled myself to become teachable and open-minded to change everything in my life. My sponsor told me change is not what's painful; it's the resistance to it. I got honest with myself and others. He also told me honesty is nothing but a willingness to hear the truth. I became willing to do the daily maintenance. After fifteen years of doing whatever it took to remain in the process of recovery, I then lasted only two more years of just not using. It ultimately cost me my freedom.

The program teaches me that recovery is a lot more than just not picking up; it's not that simple. It was, however, where I had to start. It was the beginning of the process and it seemed to me to be the hardest part of all. At that time, I couldn't imagine living life on life's terms without the use of drugs. I had to not want to use more than anything I ever wanted, past or present. Narcotics Anonymous showed me how to not use twenty-four hours at a time. It does work if I am willing to work it. I know it did and it will again, if I'm willing to do the work that goes into the daily maintenance that's necessary for recovery.

Today I feel I'm working a program of recovery again and it's better today than it was yesterday. I have to remember it's a process, not an event. It's progression, not perfection. It's not about not using drugs, as they are not really available to me today. It's about people, places, and things and dealing with attitudes (my own and others'). It's about honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness; accepting life on life's terms; and working on my defects of character as I become aware of them. It's about improving the quality of my life.

Recovery for me truly is a process. It is a never-ending journey. Some of the ride is smooth, some of it bumpy. I know that by working the program of Narcotics Anonymous continuously to the best of my ability in my everyday life, all my needs will be met. I will be happy and free second to none. The quality of life I have experienced in this program is on its way back. Nothing will come up that I won't be able to get through without the use of drugs.

Today I know without any reservations that there are certain things I have to do on a daily basis or I will go into relapse mode and eventually pick up. The end result will always be jails, institutions, or death. The daily maintenance I spoke of earlier is what keeps the process of recovery going. I was told if I'm not working on recovery, I'm working on relapse. It does work if I work it.

I am grateful to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous and the program of recovery it has shown me. I was told a grateful recovering addict will not relapse. In order to keep it, I need to give it away. In closing, I would like to say it would have been a lot easier to have done the next right thing when nobody was looking five years ago and not have picked up instead of picking up and having to stop again.

DB, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is Billy H. I am currently in a federal detention center in Nebraska. I'm looking at eighteen more months of prison recovery time. I have been attending a twelve-step meeting and I also attend NA once a week. I truly believe that with my higher power by my side I will go in the right direction. This is my first and (with my higher power's help) the last. I lost my wife and child due to using. Since I've been down, I have found, through NA and a spiritual

awakening, that time is what I need. I would like to request a *Reaching Out* subscription. Thank you so much. May NA be your way as it is mine.

BH, Nebraska

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm incarcerated in Georgia, and I attend NA H&I meetings. I have been involved in the downward spiral of drugs for twenty-odd years. Coming into the system again for the sixth time for doing crimes made me a mess spiritually, mentally, and physically. I thought that God didn't care and no one else did, either.

My life consisted of playing the game of hustling daily to get money to get drugs. If I was not using drugs I was thinking about how to get money and the easy way to get drugs. Working was not an option because that was for squares and besides, I thought the stores I stole from could afford it, so it gave me the "personal okay" to boost from them. On the inside I was a wreck waiting to happen. Whenever I would get busted and sent back to prison again I would make the excuse that I didn't belong there just for doing the same minor offense. Many of my days were filled with guilt, pity, personal turmoil, and self-loathing. I separated myself from my family and friends.

Today I am a living result of a God of my understanding and the NA program. I've seen our NA group grow and I am proud to be a member of NA. I have almost two years clean and I will be released soon. The H&I volunteers who come in here have been a great help. Today I work the steps, not always perfectly, but the best I can. I read my literature, meditate, and stay focused on the God of my understanding. NA has become my life and I wouldn't change a thing. It's no picnic being locked up, but it's better than the life of using on the streets. Without the grace of God I wouldn't even be alive today; many of my friends are not. I can say I am truly blessed, happy, and looking forward to life. Of course, I will have challenges upon release, but with NA I don't fear anything. I will continue to be involved with this program for life.

Thank you, NA!

NVE, Georgia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hey, family, my name is Kaos, a chosen alias that fits my life. My real name is Rob. Well, let me start by saying I'm thirty-two and have been avidly fighting the disease of addiction for eighteen years now. Using has ruined my ability to have a successful life three times over. I've been a resident of the California Department of Corrections off and on for fourteen years. I'm tired! I've come to discover my problem isn't prison, drugs, or other people, it's ME. I've had quality cleantime and a successful job. I have a fear of success. I've sabotaged myself more than once. This last time I was out only twenty-one hours after doing two years straight. However, I'm still clean despite everything.

Now I have over two years clean. I plan on being of service by facilitating meetings when I hit the line again. I have something I never had and have always had a problem with: my Higher Power. I have 100% faith and feel better about my success. I'm learning patience, acceptance, and tolerance of life. Another thing, I'm not alone. I could really use some advice and guidance. Well, I'm going to close by saying I hope to see this published, and I'd like to hear back if possible.

Respectfully,
RM, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is R, and I'm a recovering drug addict. By the grace of my Higher Power, through the freedom of Narcotics Anonymous, I'm grateful for a few twenty-four hours clean today.

Following the divorce of my parents when I was nineteen years old and the ensuing disillusionment and confusion I experienced as a result, I turned to drugs and the streets to soothe my pain. Having been reared in a religiously protected environment, I found myself ill-equipped to deal with the traps I encountered within the drug culture of the streets, and I blindly stumbled into prison at the age of twenty-two. Needless to say, it was a "rude awakening." However, at that time I was still in denial about my drug addiction or, rather, I was ignorant about the disease of addiction. So, although I left prison at the age of twenty-five with good intentions, I ended up again falling back into the hole of drug addiction.

During this period of release from prison, sometime in 1993, while connected with a former prison associate with whom I was hustling to support my habit, I happened to find an NA Basic Text on his shelf and opened it to the chapter, "Who Is an Addict?" Those first italicized words resonated spiritually with me, and planted the first seeds of hope for breaking the chain of addiction I knew had me bound. While I still remained trapped in addiction, and didn't then know about the rooms of NA, in retrospect, that spark from the leading care and love of a Higher Power had spoken a message to me that remained to haunt me.

Numerous geographical changes, trips to jail, and petty crimes, including disappointments to family, continued due to my drug addiction. Finally, in 1999, I was sentenced to a long prison term which I'm still serving today, for actions directly related to my drug addiction.

In 2003, I lost my mother to death, which was a turning point in my addiction that had continued even into prison. At that point, I realized that my drug addict behavior was costing me too much, so I've since committed myself to the NA H&I meetings here and continue to make progress away from active addiction. Glory to my Higher Power!

I appreciate the fellowship and literature, which help me stay resolved to live a new way without drugs. May the peace, love, and blessings of the Higher Power enfold you all.

RVT, Louisiana

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Thank you for all of the supportive material that has been sent. My serious legal trouble began just over three years ago. Naturally, it wasn't my fault; nobody understood me! How familiar are those words? Upon entering jail, I still thought, "It isn't my fault; nobody understands." I really didn't understand it myself.

A couple local NA members were bringing in meetings, and they had something I wanted badly. Initially I didn't know exactly what they had that I wanted; I just knew I wanted it. After that meeting, back in my cell I found a blue-covered NA book. I began reading it, flailing around and drowning in the steps, still in search of what those men had, and desperate to find it. By the grace of God, one

evening they dropped off a copy of *The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*. I couldn't wait to get back to my cell and tear into it. Then the words at the end of the first page jumped out at me: "There's probably only one inappropriate way to use these guides: alone." This hurt. I realized, all of a sudden, how alone I really was. I closed the guide and waited two weeks for another meeting—only to learn that I should seek sponsorship outside of the group bringing in meetings. More delays, more frustration, but I was still in search of what I had seen in those first two guys.

I wrote an old friend who had over three years clean and a year out of prison, so he agreed to be my sponsor. Off to work I went, writing down as thoroughly as possible answers to the questions; waiting, at times, for money to mail the answers to my sponsor. In my quest for what I saw in those other men, I persevered.

Upon completing the guide I felt really good—my first constructive accomplishment in a long while. Less than a week later I began to feel a void in my life. I took it upon myself to start at page one of the study guides again. After I shared this with my sponsor, he concurred that I had done the right thing. What a novel concept for a change: a good decision.

To everyone at NA World Services and *Reaching Out*, thank you once again for the literature and correspondence. Without all of the generosity I have experienced, there would still be all those people in the world who just "didn't understand me." Love and prayers...

SB, Kansas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Grace and peace to you all.

I write honestly humbled by such care and support from all those in the NA program, especially the World Board of NA, reaching out to touch us with that genuine care, faithful guidance, and love we lack in our lives. Although I serve a life sentence due to the use of drugs, I thank you for these blessings you have given me.

There are many stories of far too many people who have lost and suffered. I feel and pray we understand this serious danger that is our own death, and that will destroy us and our own families just like that. I need to be continually reminded of this to survive. Each one of you and your stories helps me. Thank you all! You give me the

hope that is real, hope that we can be filled with new life wherever we are today. *Reaching Out* puts my hands in yours, connects our lives tighter, no longer alone, but united in fellowship.

Let's help each other through this deadly disease to healing, like a caterpillar into a butterfly, like coal to diamonds, and from this dreaded bondage to freedom.

May this gift we have of Narcotics Anonymous guide our way. May love touch you, strengthen you, and give you peace by the amazing grace of the spirit of this beautiful program and people I love.

BP, Massachusetts

Eighty-four days

Following the formation of the H&I subcommittee in Iran, Payam Behboodi (the Iranian NA community's recovery journal) has been receiving letters from prisons across the country on a regular basis.

The following letter has a different story. It is from someone who got to know NA while imprisoned, despite drugs being widely available in our jails at low prices.

My name is Habib and I am an addict. Greetings to all the addicts at the Central Prison of Qazvin, and to all NA groups around the world. I am writing this letter as I pass the final moments of my life. I am very close to death. I wish to send a message to all fellow members: I got clean through a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in jail, and through attending these meetings, I stopped using drugs.

I have become very close to God, I feel good, and I am at peace with myself and the world. I have accepted the will of God.

I'd like to ask you fellows to stay clean and be of service. Try to help other addicts stay clean physically, mentally, and spiritually. Please continue this path to save other addicts.

I have nothing else to say. My name is Habib, and by dawn my life will end. I will be hanged for the crimes I committed, but I have been clean for eighty-four days beside you. I wish success for all addicts ... members and non-members. God bless.

Habib, Qazvin, Iran

Reprinted with permission from Payam Behboodi, Issue #6, Spring 2006

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

On 22 October 2006, I surrendered. I found a new life and how to live it in NA. I had to make amends for my actions. This included one year of house arrest and one year of incarceration. I had a great program coordinator and a great sponsor during my lock-up. I have been out for a month and, with help, I am working the steps again.

Where I live there are about 3,000 apartments in several large apartment communities, housing developments, and stretches of hotel accommodations. This is the first area a person sees when entering the city where I live. It appears very nice and promising. I'm fifty-six and grew up here. I've lived here since I was eleven. I became involved with drugs in 1967. The closest meeting to my area is five miles away. I want to start a meeting in this neighborhood.

Upon entering the rehab program, I was asked what my drug of choice was. I replied, "During which period of my life?" I've done them all, some for long periods of time. For forty-five years I was a drug "slave." Everybody I knew, any place I went, anything I did, was for the addiction I had. NA not only gave me a life, but is showing me how to live it. After a lifetime of drugs, the loss of many friends, and lives shattered, I may be able to show, even if only one person, that there is a life without drugs out here.

Thank You
LB, Ohio

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I have been to prison three times and have had countless short- to long-term stays in county jails. Every time I got out I went straight to the dope house. For as long as I can remember, my life has been centered on drugs and the ways and means to get more. In 1992 I was in an intensive twenty-eight-day treatment program and was introduced to Narcotics Anonymous by an H&I panel member who came there every week. I wasn't serious about getting clean at the time, but the seed was planted by this selfless individual who took the time to share a message of hope, the message of recovery in NA.

The last time I went to prison I finally figured out that if I kept doing the same thing I had always done—get out and use—I would eventually end up spending the rest of my life behind bars. Every single night I prayed to the God of my understanding to remove the desire to use and everything that goes along with that life. Only this time I believed that he could and would if I only believed that he could and would.

Today I experience freedom from active addiction as our Basic Text promises. Our literature tells us that we have never seen an addict fail who fully applies him- or herself to this program. I am living proof that lost dreams reawaken and new possibilities arise. It is only by sharing the message with others that we recover. Sharing does not imply selfishness; this is not a selfish program. The message is “that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live.”

This disease kicked my butt for twenty-five years. Thanks to Narcotics Anonymous and recovering addicts actually working their program by carrying the message, I have a life today. I am free from the prison system and, more importantly, free from the self-imposed prison that my disease told me that life was about. This is all I had to do: don't use, go to meetings, get a sponsor, work the steps, and don't use no matter what! God bless you.

In loving service,
GF, Texas

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

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

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

Reaching Out Editor



“When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man’s entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous.”

Narcotics Anonymous, “We Do Recover”

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available free of charge to incarcerated addicts through Narcotics Anonymous World Services. If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months and would like a free subscription to *Reaching Out*, complete and return the following form.

Reaching Out is also available by a twenty-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$31.00, annually. If you are interested in purchasing a bulk subscription, please complete the following form and return it along with a check or money order.

- I am an incarcerated addict (and will be for at least six more months) and want a free subscription to *Reaching Out*.
- I want to purchase _____twenty-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$31.00 each, total \$ _____.

Name _____
(PLEASE type or print clearly)

Identification Number _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Country _____

Please enclose check or money order with your bulk subscription order.

Mail to:
Reaching Out
c/o NA World Services
PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409
USA