

Reaching Out



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From the Editor

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

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

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

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

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

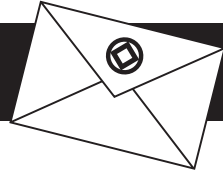


Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

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



FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JT, and I'm an addict. It's taken a while to accept that I'm an addict. From 2006 to 2008 I would tell myself that I was just having fun, enjoying life; but as time went by, I kept getting high, and I realized I needed help.

NA gives me strength to know that I'm not alone, not the only one who has addiction, and it allows me to open up, relate to others, and feed off my relationships with others. Through NA I live to trust, to not be shy, to ask for advice, and to let someone know what I'm going through rather than following my old ways.

I'm paroling soon, and because of NA I'm not afraid of what's out there. I've even asked my PO for NA listings and a clean living facility. I'd like to thank you, NA, for being there for us.

JT, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J. I am an addict. My story does not differ from most. I would say I've been using for 40-some-odd years, but the truth is that drugs had been using me. I am presently incarcerated and due to reenter society within the next eighteen months. I am very frightened because I still have a strong obsession to use. I was homeless before this incarceration, and since then I have lost my wife, who died, and everything I owned.

I've always had a misconception about drugs. I've been to NA meetings and other programs, the whole nine yards. And just as the Basic Text says, many of us end up in jail. I will no longer be on parole or probation when I leave here (scary). I know without a doubt that this program is in the business of saving lives. I've been reading the booklet *Behind the Walls*, and it's very uplifting to know that we are more alike than different. I don't know where I am going to be released to; hopefully to a shelter of some sort.

A homeless addict who does not want to continue hurting,

JW, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi. My name is D, and I'm an addict. Today is my fifty-sixth birthday and my tenth year incarcerated. The last day I got high was in April 2009. This incarceration is unique because the people who love me are supportive instead of being judgmental. NA has enlightened me to the fact that my addiction impacts my loved ones more than I ever realized.

From my place of wounds I constructed a false self through 43 years of addiction. Out of a few gifts I acquired through life, my addiction worked for me and I lived off it. My addiction has been my defense against emotions and has aided me in creating my false self. But guess what? Through NA and a fellow recovering addict, I've found a new way of life and the real me.

My aim was not off when I found the NA group here in this facility. Finding NA and accepting a God of my understanding was easy once I became willing. Practicing honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness is HOW I've ignited my recovery. Presently, God has put me in a place where my deepest wounds and sins of the past are gone. What a profound and freeing feeling this is. I'm learning through NA today.

My real life's journey has begun, now that my false self has failed once more. God's love for me is evident in spite of my errors, sins, character defects, and the laws I may have broken. Through NA I've discovered that when we submit our will to God's will, we find true happiness and are able to enjoy serenity in our lives.

In closing, I want thank you at *Reaching Out* for the opportunity to share in my restoration to sanity through NA.

DB, Texas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JW, and I am a recovering addict. At this moment I am doing time in a youth center, all because I am struggling with keeping myself clean on the outside. I've been in and out of this place since I was twelve, and I don't want to move on to the adult system.

I have been in rehab a few times, but it never really worked. I guess it was because I wasn't ready to change who I was or what I was becoming. I let people down time after time, pushed people away who loved me the most. All I cared about was another fix and

nothing else. I think to myself now, “Why do I do these things to myself? Why do I poison myself with this stuff that is ripping my life apart? Why steal and manipulate the people who love me just to buy something that should have no meaning in my life?”

Since I started going to NA meetings every two weeks, I have felt great. I’m not worried I’ll use when I get out this time, because I know there are people waiting for me to support me in any way I need, and there are meetings I can attend.

I want to thank the people at the youth center for bringing NA into my life.

JW, Newfoundland, Canada

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is JS, and I am an addict. Recently I celebrated six years clean, and I’ve also been in prison six years. I have 17 more years to go, which means I’ll be released when I’m 59 years old.

While I have been in this facility, an addict brought in an NA meeting. It was the most liberating experience of my life. Today, because of NA and my sponsor, I have begun to love myself. The past no longer haunts me, and even in this prison my future doesn’t scare me. I have completed every substance abuse program this facility offers. I also lead the weekly group, and have been blessed with taking two other men through the steps. I know that I have many difficult years to go, but my Higher Power now leads, guides, and protects me. I am extremely grateful to be alive today, and I am willing to help anyone who still battles addiction.

Even though I am locked up, for once in my life I feel free—free of my addiction that consumed my whole life. *Reaching Out* really helps me to see that I am not alone in this world. Thank God for those who carry the message to incarcerated addicts!

JS, New Jersey

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is S, and I’m an addict. That statement used to be something I’d joke about as I sat at the bar, but today I know that the disease of addiction is no joke.

I started using in the 1960s at about age twelve, and during many years of being a hippie and then a biker, the using that went along

with those lifestyles was exciting and fun. Getting high eventually became what I lived for, and the romance of the lifestyle was gone. In its place was a driving obsession with “the getting and using and finding the ways and means to get more.” (Basic Text, “Who Is an Addict?”) I fancied myself a dealer, but all I ever accomplished was using up most of what I had to sell.

As a teenager I was in trouble with the law a lot, and that continued into adulthood with a three-year prison term. Consequences only mattered in the moment when I was experiencing them. I used in prison. I got out and used on parole and got into more trouble. I went into treatment to avoid a second prison term and talked a good game there, but as soon as I got out it was like my disease was doing push-ups outside, waiting for me, and was stronger than ever. I used for 30 years and experienced a lot of consequences, including sexually transmitted diseases. It seemed like nothing could keep me from using.

In 1993 I finally was desperate enough to go to Narcotics Anonymous, and the addicts there told me I only had to change one thing, and that was EVERYTHING. That attempt at recovery failed after one year because I was unwilling to surrender. I went back out for a few more years and continued to fight on my own, and all I got for my effort was more using and more misery. My short time in NA did plant a seed, however, and at age 40 in 1996, I finally reached that point of desperation we need to experience. I was finally willing to surrender, admit my powerlessness, and ask for help. I wanted to stop using, but I didn’t know how to stop, and I knew from my previous experience with NA that the addicts there could show me the way. I was finally willing to do whatever it takes to recover, and I jumped in with both feet.

After finally finding the courage to ask someone to sponsor me, I began to work the steps with a sponsor and the change began. I got another chance at life. The insight I gained into my character from sponsorship, regular meeting attendance, and step work enabled me to change, to grow emotionally and spiritually, and to save my marriage and my career. I found a Higher Power, and with the love and guidance of that power and many other powers greater than myself, I grew into the person I am today.

I owe it all to NA and my Higher Power; I just did what was suggested. I just celebrated 13 years clean, and there are no words to

describe the gratitude I feel for what this program has given me. I know the best thing I can do to express that gratitude is to give back what was so freely given to me. I just want to tell all the brothers and sisters who are locked down that we don't have to live in the horrors of active addiction anymore! There is hope, and we can change!

Remember the message of Narcotics Anonymous: "An addict, any addict, can stop using, loose the desire to use, and find a new way to live." (Basic Text, Tradition Five) All we have to do is surrender and follow this program to the best of our ability.

SL, Ohio

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RM and I'm a recovering addict. By mainly working the steps I will have seven years clean this November, which is a great blessing and accomplishment for me. The NA books say that drug use is only one symptom of addiction. At present I'm working Step Four, but the steps I have worked so far have caused me to recognize other symptoms of my addiction. I have come to see that these symptoms can be just as dangerous as drug usage. I know I must apply the steps to all of my symptoms to keep my addiction arrested. I'm grateful to have almost seven years clean and to be at this point in my recovery. I know I must stay consistent with my recovery in order for it to continue to grow. Hopefully, within the next two months I will be moved to a prison that has an NA meeting. Until then, I will continue to do the best I can with what I have. I hope that all recovering addicts continue to progress in their recovery.

RM, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is B, and I am a recovering addict. I have been using since the age of twelve. I am currently incarcerated once again. This makes the twenty-second time I have been locked up, this time for seven months, and I have 213 days clean. Amen!

I was headed for death and self-destruction before finding NA. I believe this case is the best thing that has ever happened to me. People say the third time is a charm. Well, for me, my twenty-second time is my charm. I am currently involved in an NA meeting once a week and actively working the Twelve Steps. I have learned a lot about

honesty and respect. My self-esteem has improved tremendously now that I have a Higher Power in my life and I have turned my life and will over to the care of God. I have peace, serenity, and happiness.

Unlike so many others, I have no family or friends who support me. I've burned so many bridges due to my addiction. But now that I feel this great joy and see how much better life is clean, I want to reach out to every one of you who is still using and wrap my arms around you and share with you what I have learned. I never thought coming to jail would make me want to stop doing what I was doing. But listen when I say, there is a point in life when you get sick and tired of being of being sick and tired. It's when you get sick of seeing the inside of institutions and jails, and sick of the pain and the hurt your addiction brings. And when you reach that point, know that your Higher Power, NA, and I will be there to help lift you up and get you on your feet. Even for those of you who think there is no hope, trust and believe there is hope. I know that after 14 years of using, if I can do it, you can too!!! Keep your head up, keep the faith, and remember, I love all of you. God bless.

BC, Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RG and I'm an addict. After eight years of cleantime and no recovery, it was a matter of time before I would have to face the ultimate problem: myself. This disease has taken me through so many pleasant and unpleasant journeys. I am 56 years of age and once again incarcerated. I must admit that after 38 years of abusing myself and terrorizing many people in my path, along with being in numerous controlled environments, I have finally reached a breaking point.

I honestly completed the first three steps, and I began to feel a little differently. The feelings of pain, loneliness, despair, resentments, self-centeredness, denial, obsessions, reservations, etc.—through all of these feelings, hope entered into the picture. A gift so freely given was the set of tools that are the spiritual principles of NA. I truly accept and try to implement them on a daily basis: honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness to do whatever is needed to face life on its terms.

To the many of us who suffer from the disease of addiction in and out of institutions, give yourself a break and try to find your true self through the spiritual journey of Narcotics Anonymous.

RG, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is EP, and I am an addict. I have been incarcerated since June 2003. Even with a life sentence I had not hit rock bottom. Even in prison I continued to use, so on 1 June 2008 I did my last drug. It finally dawned on me that I can't continue living (or, rather, killing myself) like this. I went cold turkey and thought I was going to die; the voices in my head drove me crazy.

I attended my first NA meeting on 19 June 2008. I don't remember much, but I do remember the relief and exhaustion I felt when I heard myself say, "I am an addict." Now I say it daily, and I am still learning the power of admitting this while clean for one and a half years now.

If there is one thing I believe about this program, it is that it works. We must remember that as hard as we used, we must work at our recovery harder. Walking into our first meeting will not instantly cure life's problems, but it is a start. As long as we work the steps, attend meetings, get a sponsor, and come to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we never have to use again.

There is so much love and belonging in these meetings. I have found trust, dependability, strength, and hope in prison while doing life. I know that if I can do it, anyone can do it, particularly those of you who read *Behind the Walls*. Keep your head up and in the fellowship.

Thank you, NA, and may God bless the addict who still suffers and show that addict the way home.

EP, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is WD, and I am an addict. I have been incarcerated since 1988, which is directly related to my being an addict, and I have 14 years clean.

No one would have ever dreamed it would be possible for a hopeless dope fiend like I used to be to stay clean. I started taking

drugs at the age of eleven, and as a result have spent most of my life behind steel bars, concrete walls, and fences lined with row upon row of razor wire. Today I am freer on the inside than when I was on the outside. Why? Because I live my life the NA way, which, in my opinion, is to live the Twelve Steps, go to meetings, and share my experience, strength, and hope with others; to have a sponsor, sponsor others, and always be of service. Living the NA way has given my life new meaning. I am blessed with seeing my Higher Power use me to help others find a new way of life, but I am under no illusion. I am no miracle. I am just evidence that miracles happen, and for that I am grateful.

WD, South Carolina

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JMW; I am an addict. I have been incarcerated six years. I also celebrated six years clean recently. Thanks, *Reaching Out*, for giving us the chance to receive and carry the message of hope to the addict who still suffers. Jails, institutions, and death—I've been to countless institutions, and it took me coming to prison before I could become free of my active addiction. I am 50-plus years old and I have never before had as much as six months clean, yet by working the Twelve Steps of NA and having a sponsor, I have six years clean. The message is that no addict needs to suffer from active addiction ever again; we do lose the desire to use drugs. The message is hope and the promise is freedom from active use.

By the will of my Higher Power, I will be released in a few years. I look forward to sharing my experience, strength, and hope. Our meetings here have grown from two members to ten within six months. I share readings from *Reaching Out* in every meeting to show that we are not alone.

JMW, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is G and I'm an addict. I am incarcerated, serving a three-year sentence. I have just over two years left. I was introduced to NA almost ten years ago, and it has taken me almost nine years to take the first three steps. I have finally become willing to surrender and accept help. I am exactly one week shy of nine months clean. Although I am in prison, I feel freer than I have for a long time. Today is Tuesday. On Sunday, I shared my Fourth Step. That was huge for me! I had written a Fourth Step before, just over a year ago, but before I could work a Fifth Step, I relapsed. I allowed circumstances to get in the way of my recovery.

Today, I am committed to doing whatever is necessary to stay clean. In a way, I am working with two sponsors, one who is on the street and one who is in here with me. Although it's not necessarily ideal, I've found this system works for me and provides me with both the experience and the accessibility I need.

Finally, I try to be of service to NA here in the prison. I am a member of the steering committee. This has proven especially challenging; bureaucracy is difficult to navigate, and it's hard to watch traditions get violated. I'm trying to find a balance between actively working to sustain the concepts and traditions and recognizing my level of powerlessness over some circumstances. I have decided, though, that I am in it for the long haul. I'll do whatever I can. Many times, though, I feel I need some guidance. I don't have access to the group booklet or the service guides. These would be incredibly helpful, and if there is some way that they could be provided to me, I would do my best to study them and follow them to the best of my ability.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. Thank you for helping to spread the message, and thank you for helping me to stay clean.

GD, Ohio

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I had been in treatment for about two weeks when a panel was brought in. They shared their experience, strength, and hope with me, and by the time they left I was dead-set that I was never going to use again. When I left treatment I did everything I wasn't supposed to do and ended up relapsing. After 31 days in a psychiatric setting, I was sent to the same treatment center as before. It just so happened that I got there the same week that the H&I panel was due to return.

On the day they came I was feeling embarrassed, guilty, and hopeless. I didn't want those same people to see me back there, defeated once again. They soon came in and I made eye contact with the same people who had seen me there before. I tried to disappear into the background, scared of what they would say to me or what they thought of me. Instead they came over and, one-by-one, hugged me and welcomed me back. It was that moment when I felt hope again. I immediately decided I wanted what they had, so I took charge of my life, changed my people, places, and things. I was urged to get a sponsor, which I did promptly. I started working steps and kept coming back.

That panel taught me to accept that I had a problem, but that there is a solution. I have now been clean six months, all because those same people welcomed me back, told me it was going to be okay, and supported my recovery. I am forever grateful to NA and the people who helped save my life.

Anonymous, Nebraska

Dear *Reaching Out*,

In January of 2006 I was in a treatment center. After about one week I was still in that self-will-run-riot mode. Several guys in a men's afternoon group really kicked my face in. They told me I was full of crap and needed to quit wasting their time and the staff's time and, most importantly, the bed that someone who wanted recovery could use. Well, that made me really mad, but got me thinking that

all these people can't be saying the same thing without there being some truth to it. The next day a speaker came in and shared his story. Except for places and dates, this man told my story verbatim.

Hope was born; I felt if he could do it, I could too. I started taking suggestions and going to meetings. I lost the desire to use. I'm finding a new way to live, enjoying freedom from active addiction.

I am a little over three and a half years clean and have been doing H&I work for two and a half years. They said that I can only keep what I have by giving it away. What I have today is so precious that I can't wait to give it away, and I do every chance I get.

RS, Nebraska

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is K, and I'm an addict. I'm grateful to be clean and to have found a new way of life in NA. I have to say that I know if I had gotten what I deserved, I'd have spent the better part of the last 20 years in jail. The only reason I've been fortunate enough to have had the experiences I've had during those 20 years is because I didn't get caught. The two times I did get caught doing some of those things we do while we are finding the ways and means to use, I only spent a day or a few hours locked up.

When I had reached the end of my road, I found, as all recovering addicts do, that I could no longer go on as I had been, and I knew I needed help to stop using. I didn't know at that time that I needed a new way to live. I just thought maybe I needed a break. What I found through coming to meetings and through listening to addicts who have managed to stay clean and build lives worth living was that NA offers us much more than a break or a rest. NA offers us a program of change.

I never knew what it was like to truly belong or to be a part of a group. I tried to fit in. I tried to alleviate the pain and loneliness that were a part of my life from my earliest recollections. I did a lot of very destructive things in my life in an effort to not feel so different, so apart from everyone with whom I came in contact.

In NA I've learned how to connect with my fellow recovering addicts at a level I never thought possible. Through the steps I have found the tools to be able to mend relationships with my family and I've been able to form long-lasting, healthy relationships with people

in recovery. In the years since I stopped living the way I used to live, I have been shown how to live life without the limitations of my past, and I have found that those limitations involve a lot more than just my drug use. My behavior was not just at the request of my drug use. I thought when I got here that I stole, lied, cheated, and conned just so I could use, but I found in recovery that all those behaviors were part of my addiction, for even when I wasn't using, they came all too naturally until I began working those steps with a sponsor.

Prior to recovery I had a lot of trouble with authority figures because I never felt any level of identification with them. In recovery, I found my fellow recovering addicts had been where I'd been, and when I listened to their experience, strength, and hope, I heard an incredibly powerful and life-saving message of how I, too, can learn to live beyond the limitations of my past ways. In my recovery I've arrested my disease, and that means that while I continue to do the things I need to do to maintain my recovery, I am no longer living in the grips of the degradation and despair that were the cornerstone of my life before recovery.

NA taught me: "An addict, any addict, can stop using, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live." What a powerful statement that is. I've seen the proof in the lives of those around me. I see what happens to addicts who continue to work this program and to those unfortunate ones who decide not to. I know it absolutely works when we work it. The pain of abstinence is also a misery that I never, ever want to experience again. Every day I do myself a favor and make the decision to chase my recovery with all the energy and enthusiasm that I used to chase my drugs with...and it is that decision that keeps me free.

KA, Connecticut



“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*.
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