

Reaching Out



Volume 26, Number 1

January 2011

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From the Editor

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

There are two sections; "From the Inside" is filled with letters from incarcerated addicts sharing their experience, strength, and hope as they find and maintain recovery from addiction through NA. In the second section, "From the Outside," NA members on the outside and Hospitals & Institutions subcommittees have a chance to offer their experience, strength, and hope. Many of these letters come from members who are deeply committed to carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the NA message on the inside and are now living and enjoying life on the outside.

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

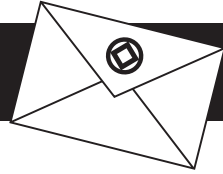
We recently developed worksheets to help our readers contribute to *Reaching Out*. On page 8, this issue features a tool for incarcerated addicts who want to share their stories. On page 12, we offer a similar tool designed for members who found NA on the inside and are now maintaining their recovery on the outside. These new *Reaching Out* tools are also available on our website:

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

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

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

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RR, and I'm a recovering addict. I was brought up in Virginia. My father worked paving driveways and my mother stayed home with my brothers and sisters and me. My family had five girls and three boys; I was the second-youngest. When I was a kid, I was good in sports, especially basketball. I think I could have gone professional if I hadn't started using drugs at the age of 20. After that, I was in and out of jail and treatment.

I am now 41 years old and I am incarcerated. I recently signed up for NA on the inside; we meet twice a month. When I first went, we talked about the First and Second Steps. I didn't share because I was too nervous, but when I continued going, I finally got the courage to share. I have learned that it is good to go to meetings if you seriously want to stop using drugs.

Since I started going to meetings, I have changed my attitude toward life and the way I carry myself. I get a lot out of the meetings, and I am serious about recovery. Being an NA member means a lot to me! What I learn in the meetings helps me, and I hope to be able to help others get clean someday. I have been clean almost a year and I am going to try my best to change my life. This means I am going to continue to go to meetings.

RR, VA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is DG. I'm 42 years old and from Texas. This is my first time in prison. I will probably be serving about ten years as a direct result of my addiction.

I came to my first NA meeting in 1995. I have had brief periods of recovery in my life, and even worked in the field of addiction treatment. Relapse has been my downfall, and that is why I am locked up today.

Being inside, I have had an opportunity to get back into recovery. I attend meetings weekly and serve as a group secretary. I share my

experience and welcome the newcomers every week. I have come to be grateful for the arrest that gave me another chance at recovery and life.

I have been working my steps and my desire to use has been lifted. I practice prayer and meditation, like the Eleventh Step talks about. I also hear my Higher Power in meetings. I am grateful for the awareness that this way of life has given me.

Being an NA member means that I am learning how to live my life in a more productive way than I used to. I am of service, and I enjoy the fellowship of other recovering addicts. Recovery means that I am learning to trust my Higher Power, clean house, and be more useful at helping others. For me, G.O.D. means "good, orderly direction."

DG, TX

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Thank you, NA, for all the support. I am an addict who is in desperate need of a better life. I was a member of drug court, but I messed up and now I am headed away for a while. I have a daughter who I love very much and a fiancée waiting for me. More than anything, I want to be able to take care of my family when I get out.

I love the fellowship of NA. I had never been welcomed with open arms before in my life. I had never had unconditional love in my whole life, and at my first meeting people came up, wanting to hug me! At first I thought it was a cult or something, but I sat back and listened and soon realized I was the same as them.

I didn't work the steps before, and I relapsed. I knew there was a better way, but I continued to run in fear. In the back of my mind, you guys gave me hope. I'm locked up now, but I'm ready to hit the steps hard and spread the message of recovery. Thank you for all your support, and to anybody who reads this, remember: Your Higher Power loves you and wants you to have a better life. So, hang in there and don't give up. All we have is today. Thanks, *Reaching Out!*

RA, MI

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is BJ and I am an addict. I have always felt different from everybody else. I thought drugs could fix me, but they landed me in prison. I realized that nearly every woman I am locked up with is

an addict. We are all here because of our disease, but not everybody will admit it.

I have found that going to NA meetings helps me stay clean and strong. I never had a Higher Power in my life before, and now I do. I am starting to learn about turning my will and my life over, thanks to the steps.

Through NA, I am learning how to be happy by going to meetings and working on myself. I let others help me and I can help them, too. I have faith today. NA meetings help me stay clean, just for today.

BJ, MI

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, I'm a 27-year-old addict. I am the son of two addicts who, unfortunately, never gave NA a chance. They both lost their battles with addiction. I'm from a small town; I first found NA in a homeless shelter after getting out of jail. They helped me see that my biggest problem was my addiction. They also made me understand that it was not my fault that I have this disease, but I am responsible for my recovery. They were like a family to me.

I went to meetings every night; I liked to listen and share, but I never got a sponsor or paid much attention to the steps. I know now that if I had worked the steps, I could have possibly avoided all of this. Because I didn't do the work on the inside to change, I relapsed. I am serving a stretch for a crime related to my addiction. It's hard, but I know that my Higher Power actually blessed me. If I had continued the way I was, it could have been much worse.

Thanks to the NA message, I have a better chance when I get out this time. I might not have a home, but I will have a family. I know they will receive me back and help me learn to live clean, just for today. Thank you to my NA family!

WC, VA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Greetings from the inside! My story is about relapse; I was clean before, for almost three years. When I got clean, I attended 90 meetings in 90 days, got a sponsor, and got into service. I was a meeting secretary with 60 days clean and became the chair of the activities committee when I had two years. I was a trusted servant for NA, and

it felt so good! However, I learned if we don't maintain our recovery, those promises of jails, institutions, and death can come true!

I was injured in a work-related accident. I started taking pain medication and struggled to do what was right. I should have reached out more, called my sponsor, and gotten help. I went from taking the pain medication as directed back to my disease, in a matter of months. I went from having almost three years clean to being locked up and headed back to prison in the blink of an eye!

What I learned while I was clean stays embedded in my brain. I know now that I didn't work the program. I wish there was a happy ending to this letter, and maybe there is. I have learned from this experience not to take recovery for granted. There is a silver lining to every cloud; I'm optimistic about everything. I look forward to getting out and going back to my old home group.

Though I feel a lot of shame, I know that in NA I am never alone. Thanks, NA, for being there for the still-suffering addict.

MA, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JS, and I am an addict. I am 17 years old; my 18th birthday is on 14 October. I will spend it in a juvenile correctional facility because of my addiction. I hope to be released in early 2011.

I am writing to *Reaching Out* because I think it is finally time for me to do something about my addiction. I tried drugs for the first time when I was twelve, but I have been using every day for about four years. Since I started getting high, my life has been full of pain.

I have been locked up ten times. I have tried all the programs here at juvenile hall and attended meetings. I even tried working the steps last time I was locked up. I forgot to reach out for help; I didn't prepare for how hard it would be to stay clean once I was released. I went back to my old ways immediately. I don't want to do that again.

I have lost many of my loved ones because of addiction. I have put my mother through hell. People in my past told me that I would never amount to anything when I grew up. I want to prove those people wrong. I want to show them, and myself, that I can stay clean and have a better life. I hate the disease of addiction and what it does to me.

I have an eight-month-old daughter. I love her and her mother very much and I want to be able to help them. I want to show them that I can be a father, mentor, and provider. Because of my drug use, I missed out on a large portion of my own childhood. I want a better life for my daughter.

I am sick and tired of this lifestyle. I know that if I use again after I leave here, I will eventually end up in the adult system. That's if I'm lucky; I could end up six feet under. I have already given this disease too much of my life, and I'm ready to change. Thank you, NA, for giving me some hope for a better life.

JS, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is AW and I am from North Carolina. I found NA back in 1998 when I went to prison the first time, but I didn't take it seriously. I played around, thinking NA would help me get out quicker. I didn't stay clean back then, but I remember the things I heard in those meetings.

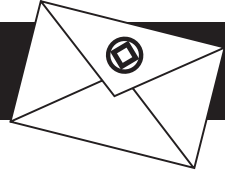
Now I am back in prison, back in NA, and I have been clean for a year. I am still learning the NA way, but I am willing today. I started by admitting that I am powerless over this disease. I have been through the revolving door because of addiction; it will be different for me now.

I have some people to talk to in NA, and they understand. I have a place to go and that feels good, too. I am learning how to love *me* by loving them. I look forward to NA meetings because it's nice to finally belong somewhere. I learn so much from my NA brothers.

AW, NC

You're invited to submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We are always grateful to hear recovering addicts like you share their experience, strength, and hope from behind the walls.

FROM THE INSIDE



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

Tell us about your first NA meeting.

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

How has NA changed you?

What does being an NA member mean to you?

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

Please send your story to *Reaching Out*; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to HandI@na.org.

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am writing to you guys from the outside now, because I want to share my experience, strength, and hope. I was incarcerated for several years. I did more time in prison as an adult than I could ever have imagined. While in custody, I did everything I could to change. I stayed away from the drama and wrote NAWS to get help finding a sponsor. I worked nine out of twelve steps before I paroled. NAWS directed me to a "Sponsorship Behind the Walls" program that prepared me for the transition to life on the outside. While inside, I also wrote to *Reaching Out* and my story was published in the July 2009 edition, when I had 18 months clean. I just took a three-year cake, and I am keeping my promise to carry the message by writing to you guys now from the outside.

I currently have a sponsor and we are working the steps together. I am also getting help for my anger issues. I am finally enjoying life! I am cool with my parole agent, my wife, and the rest of my family. Life gets difficult out here sometimes, but the majority of my life is beautiful. I do not regret what it took to get clean; my story includes a lot of prison time, but it helped me learn.

If you are like me, and believe that you are an addict, you can get help from NA. While in custody, you can take steps to help with the transition home. If you are a lifer and feel that you need help, you can work the NA program, too. Physical freedom is only one aspect of life; the freedom we get from working the Twelve Steps is amazing, and anybody can have it. Once you find a sponsor who will walk you through the steps, you will be on your way. I just made a commitment to be an NA sponsor for inmates in custody. I did this because that is what saved me from myself.

Write NAWS to get the information that you need, and do not let this message go in one ear and out the other. Take action now, before you get released. My life is wonderful, and I hope that it can be for you as well. My heart goes out to you all, because I do understand what you are going through. It is tough to love anything in there, but I suggest that you try to learn to love yourself. From the outside with love,

SM, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is DJ and I'm an addict. It didn't take long after I got to these rooms for me to admit that I am an addict. All I had to do was hear one story from those H&I guys and I knew. They brought the NA message into the facility that I was in.

I didn't know or like these guys at first, but their stories rang true. The more I listened, the more I believed. Before long, I made a friend. I had never been too good with having friends. Before NA, my friends consisted of anyone doing wrong; it didn't matter what it was. I was destined to be a nobody, going nowhere, and I thought I didn't care. This deadly disease owned me.

I had no aspirations, no ambition, and I did not want to be around anybody who did. It amazed me how many people would get high, and then spend the whole time talking about wanting to be clean. It got to the point where I couldn't enjoy myself because I was too busy thinking about how I was going to get the next high. This attitude kept me locked up for a long time, in and out . . . in and out. I was out of control.

I am so grateful for NA. While I was locked up, they sent me literature and brought in H&I panels. I read *Reaching Out*, and I started to understand that it all starts with that first drug. I made some new friends on the inside and we formed a meeting.

I have been out for quite some time now. I have 21 years clean. I have a home, a wife, a car, a dog, and my family back in my life. I still go to meetings regularly, I still have service commitments, I sponsor, and I talk to my sponsor, work the steps, and trust in my Higher Power.

I say these things not to brag, but to let you know that this could be your life. You can take vacations or do whatever you want; this is your world! All you have to be is willing. Narcotics Anonymous has but one promise—freedom from active addiction. Keep coming back to get it.

DJ, FL

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RH and I'm an addict. I would like to share my experience. I am an addict who had been introduced to the fellowship, but could not make the commitment to myself. So I struggled for years. Finally, during my last incarceration, I got scared. I thought I was

going to die. I remember getting on my hands and knees, praying to my Higher Power, and the next morning I was still there.

I started going to NA meetings and exercising. I would watch the women from NA come into our facility each month, especially this one woman who I later found out was the panel leader, and committed to NA and H&I. She always shared openly, was always willing to listen and have a hug ready for you, just when you really needed it.

I watched this person come into our facility, month after month, always with a message of hope. This is to all the people who do H&I in these kinds of facilities: You never know whose life you are touching while you help to heal your own.

I now have over 14 years clean, still attend meetings regularly, and love my new way of life. I give back by doing what is the heart of our program—carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. I do this through my local Hospitals & Institutions committee.

By the way, I did not get clean until about a year after I was released from prison. However, the message of hope I received while I was there made a difference. The examples and the knowledge that no matter what, we can do this thing (just for today) gave me the courage and wisdom to reach out. When I was ready, I reached out to the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I'm just so grateful WE were there!

RH, PA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is JK and I'm an addict. I want to tell you about the meeting that saved my life. I woke up in jail, not remembering how I got there. I had two broken hands, scrapes on my forehead and down my cheek, and a black eye to match.

Feeling lost and empty, I heard the guards call out for an NA meeting. I picked myself up off the bench and shuffled out. Inside that meeting, I heard that I didn't have to live like this anymore. They said I never had to use again.

That gave me a sense of hope. Just knowing that I could feel love from someone I didn't know was amazing. I realized I was an addict, and they were talking to me. How cool is that? I found myself. Now I have seven months clean and I love recovery. There is hope!

JK, NE

You're invited to submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We are looking for recovering addicts like you to share their experience of finding recovery behind the walls and maintaining it on the outside. Your story carries a powerful message of hope for the incarcerated addict!

INSIDE OUT

What was your first contact with NA behind the walls?

How did you work the NA program while incarcerated?

Describe your transition from incarceration to your NA community on the outside.

Tell us about your first NA meeting on the outside.

What benefits of recovery have you experienced?

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

Please send your story to *Reaching Out*; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to HandI@na.org.

ART FROM THE INSIDE

Reaching Out is trying something new! NA communities design beautiful, recovery-oriented art for committees, conventions, and events. 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.

*This logo was designed by the "Hole in the Wall"
NA group in the Oregon State Penitentiary.*



The Oregon State Penitentiary “Hole in The Wall” group has been holding regular NA meetings on the inside for over 20 years!



If you would like to see your art from the inside or outside printed here, please send jpeg or pdf files to

HandI@na.org or mail to:

**Reaching Out; c/o NA World Services;
PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409.**



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

Narcotics Anonymous, “We Do Recover”

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

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

Reaching Out is also available by a 20-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$31.00 annually. If you are interested in purchasing a bulk subscription, please complete the following form and return it along with a check or money order.

- I am an incarcerated addict (and will be for at least six more months) and want a free subscription to *Reaching Out*.
- I want to purchase _____ 20-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$31.00 each, total \$ _____.

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Country _____

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