

Volume 31, Number 1

Reaching Out

JANUARY 2016



TEHACHAPI PRISON—1961



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“Reaching out might be the best thing we can do for ourselves—and for those around us. Seeing the program work in another person’s life affirms our commitment and gives us hope.”

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

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.

This special 30th Anniversary Edition of *Reaching Out* features letters from past issues, spanning the 30 years during which this newsletter has been in existence, as well as present day shares from members who have experienced the gift of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. We hope you enjoy this special collection of letters and stories from our members.

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.

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
April 2016	15 February 2016
July 2016	15 April 2016
October 2016	15 July 2016
January 2017	15 October 2016

The image found on the cover of this issue was taken from a pamphlet created by the Northern California Hospitals and Institutions Committee of NA. The pamphlet was used at meetings that took place at the Tehachapi Prison, about 100 miles north of Los Angeles, in 1961–1962.

A Letter from Volume 1, Issue 1 of *Reaching Out* in 1985

Dear Reaching Out,

We have a small NA group here at Staunton that meets twice a week. They started another NA group at a field unit, and are getting full support from the administration. Our group is not growing! I know I sound a little depressed, and maybe I am, but I am no quitter. I have a lot of time invested in NA, plus I owe my new way of life to the Fellowship. I would not feel good about myself if I didn't keep trying to help the still suffering addict. I would like to get someone to write to so I could share my thoughts as well as my growth. I know my Higher Power will bring me through all this. Any suggestions are always welcomed.

RD, VA

A Letter from a Member in Saudi Arabia — Present Day

Dear Reaching Out,

I am an addict from Arabia. When I was young I was very close to my parents. I always looked for praise from them. I loved to play the joker in the family. I guess that was my first emotional fix. My parents were not conservative Arabians. They would have cocktail parties and invite a lot of Westerners to them. When I was twelve years old, my brother and I would polish off the leftover alcohol. My brother would say "Eww!" and I would say "Yum!" I guess that is where my real addiction started. I had the "virus" and he didn't.

I must have been about 15 when I felt I didn't belong anymore. I didn't belong with my classmates in school, or with the friends at the British Club. Not even my cousins in Kuwait or people in my own neighborhood. I tried to fit in where I could. My disease

increased when my parents' relationship began to suffer and I could feel it. I didn't know how to handle it so I bottled up my feelings. Eventually I left school and joined my father's business. I was on the national team for handball, but my dad didn't allow me to skip work to play. Gradually I started to use more to hurt him a little. My disease started to progress, and I began to lose control. I no longer had a choice; the only choice was more.

It used to shock me about my selfishness, my being inconsiderate and my utter disregard for others, the way I manipulated my family. My brother was intimidated by my using and my rough appearance. My father never gave up on me, not then, not ever. This is the man who had everything I ever wanted. In my using days, he took me to Switzerland. It was one of his attempts to be friends with me. He experienced the worst of my cold-turkey situation. He was there for me. He suggested that I go see a doctor, but I knew the doctor would just give me sleeping pills. I eventually went to a treatment center in England.

The idea of doing a geographical change didn't work for me. I thought I was smarter than that. When I was in the treatment center I was introduced to my first H&I panel. They shared, and all I could do was look for the differences, not the similarities. I didn't come to treatment to get clean. That was my will; God's will was different. At the end of the meeting I asked one of them how long he had, and he told me one week. I asked, "In a row?" and he answered, "Yes." I asked, "How?" and he replied, "With the help of Narcotics Anonymous." He said he would take me there. Thank God for H&I—that was the first message I heard.

When I went to my first meeting, I immediately felt I belonged. It comforted me when I heard we all shared a disease called addiction. The program eventually started to mend the cracks in my life. I still relapsed from time to time, but for the first time I felt relief. After a couple of meetings, the obsession to use was lifting. On 9 February 1985 I got clean, and have stayed clean. Because I was back in Bahrain and there were no NA meetings, I had to do another twelve-step program. There was a man who took me under his wing and asked me to use my service in an-

other way. He became my first sponsor. I had a coffee commitment and learned about resentments when they would not say “thank you” to me for being of service.

One day I went to a convention in Montreal for AA, and there I connected with a member who directed me into another dimension and introduced me to NA. He was a kindhearted man. He gave me this white book and said to read it at home. As soon as I returned from Montreal, I started NA in my local area and was so happy when I received literature from the NA World Service Office. The meetings went on for two years. I went to England to study counseling for addiction. I was told by my teacher that I wasn’t good enough to be a counselor. I couldn’t comprehend this. It was very sad for me. I learned to channel my anger into something positive. I thought to myself, *I will show them.*

I decided to try 90 meetings in 90 days again, started to mix with my fellow members, and found another sponsor. Again I tried counseling, and finally I successfully completed my counseling course. I worked for a year as a counselor in a government detox center. I felt I was a messenger of God. I thought everything I touched would be cured. I finally had to humble myself when I found it not to be true. I found out the only way was to share my story with others in the hope it would reach others. I found how I could carry the message to others and began to translate the literature into Arabic. That is the longest commitment I have made to NA. I am one of those who believe that service keeps you clean.

My sponsor in America played a big part in helping to carry the message to those in Saudi Arabia. My sponsor told me I needed to work on myself and showed me how. I wasn’t ready to do this. Now I was full of self-pity. I never lost hope, and continued to work hard. My life once again became a mess. He had told me I was going through the first-decade syndrome of being clean. I kept going to meetings and calling fellow members. I have learned in recovery to give myself a break. That year passed, and my faith in the program grew.

When I had 15 years clean, I discovered I had another illness. I had to take medication for this, and it had side effects—depres-

sion, fogginess, and extreme weariness. Thank God I met someone in England who took me to a special-needs NA meeting. I felt comfortable in there; it reminded me of my first NA meeting. I learned to open up and talk about my illness. At 19 years clean I met my first sponsor at an NA convention and we embraced each other with a hug.

Maybe some members learned they needed NA just to stop using. Me, I needed it to keep me clean and show me how to live. I didn't know anything about life. NA showed me how to get hurt and find joy, too. I shared in front of 23,000 members about the resentments I had, and they finally went away. I had 20 years before my head started to unwind and become filled by peace and quiet. I came to believe. The concept of unconditional love is very broadening.

Today I really believe that I carry the chronic disease called addiction—it is physical, mental, and spiritual. I also believe I get better each day. I no longer live in dark rooms. I am a survivor, and today I am living. I am living in the light that the Twelve Steps are all about to me. I still go to four meetings a week, connect with my sponsor, and do service. I thank my Higher Power I never gave up the miracle and the gifts that NA offers. I am 30 years clean, and my journey continues. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experience, strength, and hope. From darkness to the light, the journey continues.

AA, Bahrain

A Letter from the November 1995 Issue of *H&I News*

Dear Reaching Out,

I was told when I got clean in NA “We can only keep what we have by giving it away.” I found the best way for this addict to carry the message to those who are just like me is through H&I. This is a program that I needed to get involved with. I showed up at the Area H&I meeting and introduced myself. At that point,

I could have put my name on a list and waited for someone to call. I might have waited too long.

It became my responsibility to pursue H&I service work the way I pursued my recovery. I read the *H&I Handbook* and asked questions, listened to other addicts involved with H&I and learned from combined experiences. Others had let me begin to share my experience, strength and hope with them on their panels.

My commitment to H&I has only strengthened through the years. I have learned that those members who can't get out to regular meetings depend on us. Sometimes ours is the only recovery they hear. When my head tells me I don't want to drive that way or they don't want to hear my story, that is when I need to let God back in my life and give me the strength to carry the message. Through the years my commitment to H&I was not only to carry the message, but to become active in H&I subcommittees and help with the work that needs to get done. Our members working together allow us to experience our individual and personal rewards. To be a small part in anyone's recovery is the best feeling.

The foundation of our program and H&I is what keeps me connected to those who need it.

Thank you for letting me serve.

JB

A Letter from a Member — Present Day

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is SL and I am an addict. While my using did not land me in many institutions, I certainly felt locked up in my addiction, unable to find freedom from the bondage with the vicious cycle of living to use and using to live—until I found NA.

I got clean in Northern California in January 1983, and became involved in H&I as soon as I could. Besides attending panels, I got involved in committee work, and by 1986 I was going to WSC

quarterlies to learn more about H&I at the world level. In time, I became a voting member of the WSC H&I Committee and was involved with the development and revision of the *H&I Handbook* and *Reaching Out*. I met some wonderfully committed members in those meetings, some of whom I would work and serve with for years to come.

In 1988, I was asked to come to the World Service Office to become the WSO H&I coordinator, a position I certainly never dreamt of and that gave me the opportunity to be of service on a vastly different level. I was transferred out of that position after two years and handed off that responsibility to Freddie A, who took it to entirely new levels. His loss was a great one to me personally, but an even greater one to our fellowship.

In the end, for me, H&I work is absolutely the ideal example of the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. The sharing that we do, regardless of the type of institution, feeds not only my desire to be of service, but also my absolute need to give away what was so freely and lovingly given to me. Thank you, NA and H&I, for my life.

SL, CA

A Letter from the April 2005 Issue of *Reaching Out*

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is J. I'm a recovering addict with just over two years clean. I'm also just over two years into a life sentence in Texas. I now live in a place where living a program is contrary to, if not completely against, the grain of day-to-day life.

I was first introduced to NA on the outside in 1980. Over the years I've been involved in varying degrees and in various ways in NA. In 1998 I was beaten and I became willing to do the things necessary to maintain recovery: don't use (no matter what), go to meetings, work the steps (to the best of your ability with a sponsor), read our literature, pray, and talk to other recovering addicts.

“Our only hope is to live by the example of those who have faced our dilemma and have found a way out.” (Basic Text, page 19)

As a result of recovery I was becoming a responsible, productive member of society. Against all advice of those who care about me, I began a relationship with a certain woman in the program. Meeting attendance, my business, service commitments, sponsorship and step work lost their priority.

I got well, and subsequently relapsed in earnest in the middle of April 2001. I was unable or unwilling to accumulate more than 90 days clean. The next few months went from bad to worse; a failing relationship, a failing small business, my struggle to clean up, a probation revocation and charges stemming from my stealing valuables from a business customer. One day clean, twelve days clean, six days clean. I was out of control.

On 5 October 2001 I committed the crime that I’m doing this life sentence for. It involved my father and an attempt on the life of another family member. A life sentence—you figure it out. All of this happened because I was high on a drug that I believed was something else when I bought it. In the following hours I seriously attempted suicide. I was taken into custody a couple of hours later.

Since this horrible event, I’ve never been more aware of God’s grace, mercy, and providence. I’ve lived all the eventualities of our disease at once—jails, institutions and death.

I’ve been given the gift of life. I was truly rescued from a worse prison—the one created by obsession, compulsion, and self-centeredness of our disease—rescued from insanity, depravity and death.

Today I am free to live a program of recovery. I meet regularly with my sponsor. I work and live the steps to the best of my ability. I carry the message through conversation and example, even though all the substance abuse programs throughout the state have been canceled.

NA can live without me, but I can’t live without NA. I owe my life to NA.

JM, TX

A Letter from a Member — Present Day

Dear Reaching Out,

In 1983, two H&I members, one male and one female, entered a methadone clinic in Sacramento, California, and asked if they could start an NA H&I meeting. The clinic agreed. I was on methadone maintenance and attended those first meetings at the clinic. It was there that I saw hope for the first time in my life. I had always thought once an addict, always an addict until those two members shared their stories. I knew then that there was hope for an addict like me.

I started attending meetings outside the facility at the Road to Freedom group. I had never heard of Narcotics Anonymous; I thought this was the only meeting in the world. Even though I was still using while attending these meetings, they still welcomed me back. At no time did I ever feel unwelcome despite being strung out and on methadone.

After attending meetings regularly for nine months, I finally kicked and had my first day clean. That day was 30 June 1984, and I've been clean since. I often would say I didn't "come here, come to, and come to believe." For me it was I came here and I came to believe. What I came to believe in was you. If you could get clean and stay, then maybe I could too. That was the hope I saw in those H&I members at the clinic.

Once I could sleep through the night with about 90 days clean, I was asked to attend an H&I meeting at the Sacramento County Jail. In those days Narcotics Anonymous was not welcome in many facilities. The H&I meeting was held in the lineup room, and we could not see each other. We were not allowed contact with inmates. The inmates were on one side of the partition and we were on the other. We had to speak through a microphone. When we were done we would put our hands on a six-inch-by-six-inch glass, and the inmates did the same. In those days we believed no matter what the obstacles were, the message of Narcotics Anonymous would be heard if we just showed up.

H&I may not be for everyone; however, it is for me. For over 31 years I have maintained clearance or a commitment to H&I. I have carried the message and coordinated meetings in every type of facility available to H&I over the past 31 years. I am filled with gratitude as I have watched the fellowship grow and develop worldwide. As we grow, I get great pleasure from helping others establish and maintain H&I meetings in lockdown facilities. I am also grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the Northern California Region's success with the prisons and fire camps projects over the last decade.

SL, CA

A Letter from a Member in Brazil — Present Day

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is FB. I was born in Paraná but my heart and soul have belonged in São Paulo for the last 26 years. I am currently incarcerated in prison. I decided to turn myself in and bear the consequences of my actions. On 20 August I celebrated 7 years free of drugs and alcohol. I have been in and out of Narcotics Anonymous for the last ten years. My story resembles those of many addicts I had the pleasure of meeting in the rooms.



My childhood and teenage years were marked by the reversal of the values of pride and self-sufficiency. I came from a structured family; both parents worked and were married for over 35 years. I had a great education and played various sports. Though I thought of myself as an intelligent student, I soon found myself cheating whomever I could. I have always envied others and used to do whatever I could to fit in. I lived the life and the feelings of others instead of my own, one

of my flaws. I became my own critic, and some of the biggest lies became truths in my life. I always feared being alone.

Taking drugs, petty thefts, and great emotional crises were just consequences of my life. I felt like the infinite piece of the puzzle. A bottom of isolation and pain led me to the rooms of NA at the age of 16. I was not willing to change, and barely understood the program. I just wanted to stop the pain that using brought me. During the next three years of coming and going, I went to treatment facilities and through rigorous interventions with my family.

When I was 19 years old, totally lost in another relapse, I asked for help. I had accepted and surrendered to a higher power and started to let his will take over. I found a sponsor who taught me about loving myself and being humble with who I am. I began to help others and become a productive member of society. Years went by, and the application of the principles made me stronger. However, I started giving voice to my will and compulsions, which led me to thinking I could do what I wanted, I just couldn't use. Gradually I turned away from being of service and the meetings.

At the time, I was a business owner. My old habits and behaviors soon made me lose it all. I was still clean, just living dirty. By 2013, taken over by my shortcomings, I turned the petty thefts of my youth into larger thefts. In October of that year I was caught in the act. Inside prison, I found my way back to the fellowship through H&I and again felt the love that I had been missing. This was the same endless and unconditional love that comes from one addict to another. I slowly regained respect from sponsees, and my sponsor accepted me back. Somehow my higher power felt it fit for me to be released.

For a whole year I dedicated my life to this change, but fell again to my will. I started doing the same insane things again, expecting different results. I decided in July of 2015 to turn myself in for being a fugitive. It took me two weeks to make this decision. I spent the last few days before turning myself in with my sponsor, who was once again by my side. I decided to face it all

with my head held high, and with the support of my sponsor I would not leave.

Less than a month after being back in prison, I received some literature from another member. With this came a copy of *Reaching Out*. After reading this and identifying with all these feelings of addicts who have found recovery while locked up behind the walls, I considered the possibility of writing this story. I believe in a higher power, the Fellowship of NA, and recovery. Even with the situation I am currently in, I can still find recovery. It is just a matter of time. Just for today, it works.

FB, Brazil

A Present-Day Story from India

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is AI. I am an addict. I feel my experience can help one addict behind the walls, either serving time or in treatment. I am 24 years old and can proudly say out loud that I am a grateful recovering addict in Narcotics Anonymous. It is only by giving it away that I am able to be clean today.

I was born and raised in Bangladesh. My parents separated when I was eight. I started using at the age of 13. I always felt inadequate about my surroundings. I always loved to stay in my own little world. Shy and with poor self-esteem was how one could define me at that time. I started drinking to fit in with the people around me who were also experimenting at that point. I couldn't drink like a gentleman, and always believed I had to black out to escape reality. At the age of 14 I began to use amphetamines, and my whole world changed from there. I was no longer the shy boy that I was before.

I became a loudmouthed kid; everyone noticed me and saw my leadership skills. Eventually I became more aggressive and caused violence in school. I eventually got expelled from school. All those nights partying caught up with my head. I soon changed

to using heroin in order to sleep at night. I would use heroin at night and amphetamines during the day. I was really skinny, and my family and friends were shocked to see the way I had turned out. By now I was on my way to the top, thanks to the new connections I had made. I had it all—power and money. I thought I was on top of the world.

At the age of 16 I went to a detox center and stayed for three weeks. I had fixed myself enough, and again went back to using. This pattern continued in my life for some time. I was in and out of jail for the next two years. The doctors tried everything on me, but I kept going back. I couldn't stay clean. I soon became involved with the cartel, and that's when staying home got scary. Even my family wasn't safe now. The doctors planned to send me to Bombay for treatment to do a seven-month program. I completed it and again went back to using. The nightmare of relapsing with the shame and guilt couldn't help me to stay clean.

One day I saw that the drugs were no longer helping me and I tried to overdose. Even that didn't work. I remember my father and the police tried to get me to help them, and they gave me drugs to do this. They wanted me to answer questions and tell them everything. I refused to do this and was blindfolded and led away. I thought they were going to kill me, because that is what they usually did to those in my position. They would have shot us in the middle of nowhere in Bangladesh.

When the blindfold was taken off, I found myself in another treatment facility. This time I wasn't given any meds to help with the withdrawals. It was more like a correctional facility. I was delirious for the first four days. It took me three weeks to get into shape. I remember around the second week I did something that I had never done before: I got down and prayed for the first time in my life. I prayed, "Dear God, whoever you are, please take these withdrawals away and I will find a new way to live. No more false promises."

As each day passed I felt better and better. I didn't know anything about the Twelve Steps, but I knew my way wasn't working. I saw the steps written on the wall and paid no attention to them. Only in my third month there did a miracle happen. The treat-

ment facility manager asked if I wanted to go to a convention. It was the first one in Bangladesh. I agreed to go with eleven men from that facility.

As day 1 came, I saw people happy and eating. On day 2 I saw them embracing each other with hugs and being cheerful. I thought these people were definitely on something. It wasn't until the third day, when they did the cleantime countdown, that I realized people with 25 years were celebrating, and they got it through to me, with three months, that this was the miracle. I celebrated with them, and for the first time I didn't need anything. People hugged me like no one ever had before. They said to keep coming back. No one had ever told me that before, either. Those words gave me the hope and sense of belonging.

I said goodbye to everyone and, out of gratitude, was willing to go back to the treatment facility. I was given a new responsibility. I had asked the manager for any NA literature. I read *It Works: How and Why*, as that was the only book we had available. Now it was time for action. I found an NA meeting outside when I was released in Dhaka. I became an active member, got a sponsor, and got involved with service. I did meetings, steps, and service. These are the steps I took to becoming a new me. I am proud today to say I have three years and eleven months. For those who are inside the walls, I have one thing to say: Your higher power has a plan for you. Trust and believe, and good things will happen. Work the steps, and the miracles will happen. Still living the dream, one day at a time.

AI, Bangladesh and India



Eighty-four Days; a Tribute to Habib

Since 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.

Dear Reaching Out,

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.

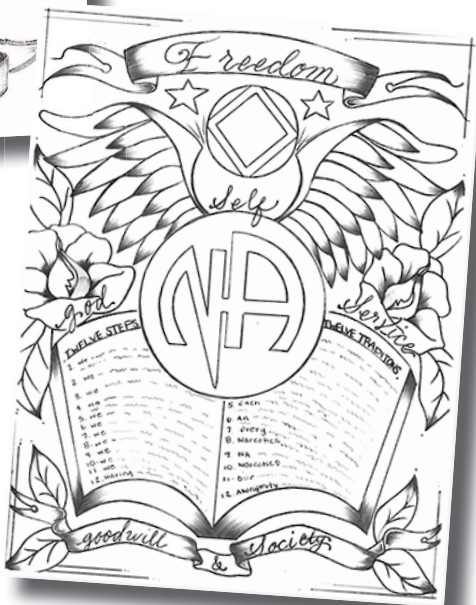
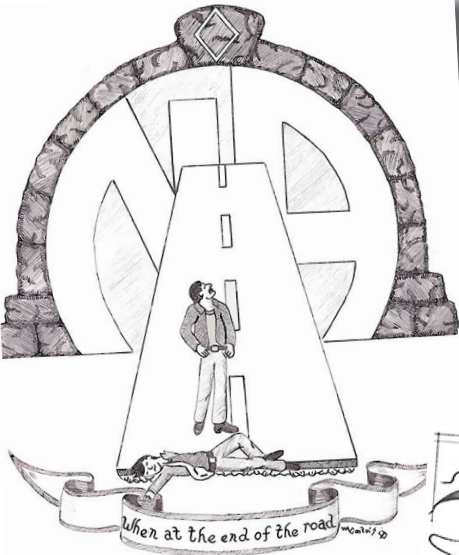
HQ, Iran

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

ART FROM THE ZSIDE

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.



CALLING ALL H&I MEMBERS!

Please 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! Thank you.

Please send your story to:
Narcotics Anonymous World Services;
PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409,
or to HandI@na.org.



Transitioning from the Inside to the Outside

Whether you left from a treatment center, jail, prison, hospital, or institution, you are moved from the “inside” to the “outside” to be drug-free, productive members of society. We think your experience may be invaluable to others as they embark upon their transition.

We are offering questions to help stimulate your thinking so that you may want to share your experience with us; we will publish your article in *Reaching Out* to help others.

1. What did you do on your first day of your release/discharge?
2. What steps did you take to help your recovery in the community? Do you think the transition steps are the same for addicts who are being released after 30 days or ten years?
3. What are some of the challenges you encountered when you reentered the community?
4. How did NA help you with information so that you were able to attend a meeting upon release/discharge?
5. How do you think that NA may have been better able to help you in your transition, and do you have any suggestions to offer so NA may be better able to help others as they transition?

We look forward to reading your experience and providing this information to others. Thank you for helping us assist others in their transition.



“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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