

Reaching Out



Volume 24, Number 3

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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.

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

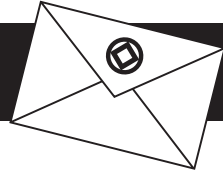


Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

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



FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I have been a drug addict since I was nine and living in an alcoholic home. I committed crimes and eventually went to jail and prison. I made a decision to get clean, but I kept going around the same people. I could manage to get six months clean, but always would go back to the same old lifestyle and using friends. I always ended up relapsing, which eventually always led me back to prison.

I've been clean now for twenty-one months. I still know that drugs are available to me here in prison, but I want a chance at life. Now that I'm clean I often feel like the outsider, but my hope lies in my recovery. I've started an NA meeting and I spend my time taking a correspondence course and writing a book. If I wasn't locked up and clean I would never take the time for either. I know I have some difficult challenges ahead of me, but my Higher Power has given me a new lease on life. Thanks for your letters.

DM, Oklahoma

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello there, I'm an addict named MCB. Although I've been an addict all of my life, I'm just now realizing it.

I've been in and out hospitals and institutions since age twelve. Now, at thirty-two, I've spent thirteen years total. I see how addiction, in one form or another, has played the leading role in my decision-making. My life was ongoing, recurring insanity from which I wanted a change, but I didn't think change was possible. That was proven wrong nineteen months ago when I was arrested on several charges. When I was at my lowest—no hope whatsoever—I landed in a drug education cell and learned of recovery. Thank God! For that day, 28 September 2007, my clean date, I will be forever grateful.

After an honest admission of my addiction and an open invitation to a higher power, I've obtained an inner peace and an optimistic view on life. Today, because of NA, my past no longer haunts me; the future doesn't scare me; and I am clean, happy, and sane. I am truly at ease.

I am not in that drug education dorm anymore and we don't have access to meetings in the general population. However, a few addicts have assembled a meeting and we help one another daily. The principles of NA work anywhere. So to anybody out there reaching out for help, grab hold of the hands of NA. It may not completely change your life or the situation you are in, but it will definitely change the way you look at it.

MCB, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is W and I'm an addict. I'm thirty-nine years old and I have been to prison three times. I have spent nine years of my life behind bars and I still must do at least four more to have a shot at being released. I can honestly say that every time I've been incarcerated, it's directly a result of drug use. I've tried everything known to man. The last time I got high was 4 April 2007. That was also my last day in the free world (outside of jail or prison). It is the day I died, but also the day I was saved. You see, while I was high and on the run from the law, a very unlucky cop pulled me over. Not wanting to go back to prison, I went into a drug rage and caught a new case. I was shot twice and arrived at the hospital an hour later.

I started going to NA meetings when I was healthy enough in August 2007, and although I'm still incarcerated today, I am still working the steps and using the program. I have found strength and hope and I see that it is possible to stay clean. Today, with the help of the NA program and the people who work it, I have a blueprint for living a normal life without drugs. I am grateful today to be alive and I now live every day with passion and purpose. Life is too short to not enjoy every day of it and live it to the fullest. If your life is being lived to use, you're not living! Every time I share my story, it helps me. I can only hope it helps those who hear it. I want to say thank you to all the people who support NA and who helped me by telling their stories and showing me there is a better way to live, than to live high. My blueprint is sketched from their success. NA is a proven program that works if you work it. If it can help me, it can help you too! Good luck and God bless.

W, Texas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

This letter is being written as a stepping-stone to encourage not only myself, but others as well. My name is K, and I am a recovering addict. By the time this letter is published I'll have seven months clean, God willing. My criminal thinking with my drug use got me the violation. I've been bouncing in and out of NA and treatment centers seven times total since I was in my early twenties. I will be thirty-eight on 31 March. I'm at a facility in Pennsylvania; I'll be released to a halfway house in June. I hated being here my first two months. I immediately sought out the NA meetings because I know of the demons I still struggle with. With the assistance of information given to me in the past and staff familiar with NA, I started on my road to recovery here. I do have a sponsor in the area where I live waiting to reconnect with me when I get out. I've started writing out my steps and working the steps with what was instilled in me. I write a gratitude list and pray every day. I go to two or three meetings and I help someone else with no strings attached. Drugs were but a symptom of my disease of addiction. I've even gotten involved in service and I chair a weekend meeting. When I am released I will get in step with an H&I subcommittee. They helped me a lot. The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.

K, Pennsylvania

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is A, and I'm an addict. First and foremost, I would like to thank the God of my understanding for showing me a new way of life and the NA fellowship. Here at my correctional facility we have two meetings a week. At our meeting I received my first *Reaching Out* newsletter. Today I focus on what I read in the Basic Text: "We must relearn many things that we have forgotten and develop a new approach to life if we are to survive." (Chapter Seven, "Recovery and Relapse") My story isn't different from that of any other addict who used, and the end is the same—jail and institutions.

A, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RM, and I'm a recovering addict in a Virginia facility. The prison that I'm at doesn't have NA meetings, so I'm grateful for *Reaching Out*, which serves as a meeting for me where I can hear the experiences, strength, and hope of my fellow addicts and share my own experiences, strength, and hope. I also maintain my recovery by doing the step work daily with my sponsor. I recently got through the Show Me Region's Writing Steps for Recovery program. One entry in *Just for Today* talks about not being comfortable about doing the things we did in our active addiction, namely, being dishonest. I believe and know that being honest these days has improved my life. Most of the time I feel it and I see the benefits of being honest. Those times are a real blessing that bring me much joy. Each day I strive to live in harmony with the spiritual principles in the steps, and I hope all recovering addicts find this desire and joy in striving to live in harmony with the spiritual principles in the steps.

RM, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is D, and I am an addict. I've been into drugs off and on since 2002, along with living on the streets, homeless and without a job most of the time. I've done quite a few scams and some criminal activities in order to support my drug habits. I am not proud of most of the things I have done to pay for drugs. In fact, I have major regrets about my past. I've attended NA meetings in my local area off and on in the past few years, and I even went to an NA convention. So I must have accepted that I am an addict. I've heard the NA message many times before but I haven't fully "listened" wholeheartedly to it or put the Twelve Steps into practice. Although this gives me absolutely no excuse whatsoever for my actions and decisions, it might explain how I've ended up back in prison yet again!

DM, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

It's simple: Don't use no matter what, go to meetings, follow the steps to the best of your ability. Do this every day, but do it one day at a time.

It's the same in here as it is out there. You just gotta want to be clean more than you want to use, one day at a time. I was unable to accept "never being able to use again" when I first began going to meetings. "What, never get high again?!" I thought. I just came to get cleaned up, clear my head, and take a breather. Surely one day, after enough attempts, I'd find the perfect remedy that would allow me to use "successfully." Yeah, right.

After twenty-plus years of trying desperately to find that perfect remedy, I was literally forced to get on my knees in an admission. It was still not an easy feat. After eleven months of following the steps, my true moment of decision came. I was sentenced to 130 months in prison, and I would begin my sentence in 120 days. I was allowed to walk out of that courtroom with the promise that I would voluntarily begin serving a ten-year, ten-month sentence, with no parole. With good time, I would have to serve at least nine years and two months.

Man, I felt as if I'd just been given a death sentence. My mind raced. I'd lose everything: my fiancée, my house, the kids would be grown; hell I'd be forty-five when I walked out. What to do, what to do...?

As I was driving away it hit me. I had this weird moment. I wanted so bad to just go get plastered. That's what we addicts do, right? When the going gets tough, we get going—right to our dealer, or the nearest street corner to cop. But, as bad as I wanted to, I couldn't. Something inside me finally broke, or maybe it "unbroke." Something inside would not let me use. Maybe it was the seed of recovery that had been planted. Maybe it was all those prayers I'd prayed for help. Maybe I had just reached the point where I knew for once that getting high would not fix this. That day I made the decision to really give this program and my life an honest attempt. I got a sponsor, and through him started working the steps. I went to as many meetings as I could. And I prayed daily.

Not by any means has it been easy. I was right about one thing that day. I lost everything: girl, kids, and home. However, what I didn't realize then is that in losing everything I got the one thing I never had—me, and I'm okay.

Today I smile real smiles. Today I listened to another addict share. Today I started my day with a prayer of thanks. Turns out it wasn't a death sentence I received that day; today I am finally alive. Whatever it was that day that kept me clean doesn't matter. All that matters is

that today, sixty-two months later, I'm still clean, still in prison, still going to meetings, still praying, and still just trying to take things one day at a time

Thank you, because I couldn't do it without all of you. Thanks for letting me share.

RW, New Jersey

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is PL and I'm an addict. I am currently serving a fifteen-year sentence due to my addiction. About three months ago I started going to NA meetings here at this unit. We have them twice a month and I'm really getting a lot out of them. I haven't used in four months, so it's still not all that easy, but the brothers at NA are helping me along. It feels good to have people I can relate to with my problems. At the last meeting I attended they had pamphlets for NA World Services, so I wrote to them and they sent me a package. I got a lot out of the *Reaching Out* newsletter and the pamphlet *Behind the Walls*. I can't wait to get the next issue. I am to be released 11 July 2017. I plan to attend NA for the remainder of my incarceration and, when I get out, find a meeting place somewhere in my hometown and dedicate every spare minute I have to helping myself and others. Well, I guess I'll close for now. I would like to thank NA World Services and *Reaching Out* for letting me share. It really helps to talk to other addicts.

PL, Arkansas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is S, and I am currently incarcerated. I am doing my third term, and this one is currently six years long. I am due for release in September 2010. I have been clean since 18 August 2007.

Since coming in and out prison I have always gotten myself involved with NA, but never did any of the work. I am familiar with *Reaching Out* and *The NA Way Magazine*, because I not only read them, but I joined the mailing lists; it's free and it helps.

I am over twenty months clean for the first time in my life. I work through the mail with a sponsor who is both kind and understanding of my situation. We work the Twelve Steps to the best of our abilities, and I've come to realize that prison only stops those who want

to recover if they choose to let it. I am on Step Six currently, and am working through prayer to begin the process of dealing with my many character defects. I just received the Sixth Edition Basic Text to update my readings. I am a clean, productive member of Narcotics Anonymous, even in prison.

My goal is simple: I will work all twelve steps in prison with my sponsor, and by the time I get out I will face the world with numerous tools to remain both free and clean. My dream is to see this writing published in an upcoming issue of *Reaching Out*, and when I take my three-year cake in an outside meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, I want to distribute and share it with members on the outside. All of this is to spread hope to inmates like me, and encourage members on the outside to do for others what my sponsor has done for me. I can and will stay clean in NA, in prison, by working the Twelve Steps.

Good luck to all,
S, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is LS. I am incarcerated and I'm a recovering addict. My addiction to drugs led me down a path that was totally destructive to my growth and to my family. I have had the experiences of jails and institutions; the only thing that was left was death. Even though I was dead spiritually, I found out there were two of me: the I and the self. I could not bear to live with either any longer. I thank God I found NA. I believe the happiest moment of my life was finding out I was not alone and that the pain that I was causing myself could come to an end if I were to follow the Twelve Steps of recovery with the same attitude I used to get my drugs. I no longer feel as if I am drowning in quicksand with no one to save me. I have let my Higher Power take control of my life. There are still difficult days and moments, but through prayer and patience I make it through them. I even have my family back. They are still skeptical because of my past. I just tell them every man or woman is capable of changing for the better at any given moment in time. I just tell them to watch as my actions speak louder than any words I can say. God bless.

LS, Illinois

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is Bob, and I am a recovering addict. I am currently sixty years old; my sixty-first birthday is eighteen days away as I write this. My nineteenth clean anniversary is four months and twelve days away. I was brought up in the Bronx, in a middle-class family. My father was a construction worker and Mom stayed home and took care of the apartment. I had an older sister. I just never felt like I belonged. I didn't belong to my family, I didn't fit in with the other kids, I wasn't good at sports, and I wasn't that bright academically. I just didn't belong! There was an older kid who lived across the street who was also a loner, a little goofy, and I felt comfortable around him. We started smoking cigarettes in the back alley of his apartment building. Then I met another guy who I thought was cool. He was a loner too, but he made it look like he *wanted* to be a loner. Then I met others just like me who felt good around each other as long as we had a common bond—getting high.

We all know what progression is like. My family moved to a different neighborhood. I met others who were doing other drugs, and eventually I met the drug that worked best for me and proceeded to do it as much as I could. The lifestyle of getting and using and finding ways and means to get more took over and, again, I was that loner doing whatever I needed to do for the next one. The short version of my using history is that I was arrested five different times on five different felony charges. Each time I went to a New York state prison for varying lengths of time, plus I was sent back four different times on parole violations. So, from the age of nine to the age of forty-two, I spent seventeen years behind the walls of state prisons, with approximately two years total in various short-term mental hospitals and observation wards. When I wasn't locked up I was imprisoned by the disease, caught up in the grips of active addiction. During that period I never gave much thought to God or a Higher Power, but that doesn't mean God wasn't paying attention to me! He had a plan. All I was capable of planning was my next stick-up or next high, but God had plans for me!

In 1983 I went from maximum-security status to medium-security status, and I was moved to the medium-security part of the prison. My cubicle was located in the unit that was the prison's drug program. I hadn't signed up for the drug program, never told them I ever had a drug problem, and didn't want to be there; but it was the only medium-security bed available, so there I was. When I realized all the addicts were in that unit and that was where the contraband was, I quickly signed up for the drug program and, for the first time in my using history, I admitted to someone else I was an addict. I didn't stop using then; I continued to use for another six years, which led to my fifth felony conviction. But the seed was planted and, from my perspective in recovery, I see the hand of God beginning one of His plans. You see, in 1983 I met the addictions counselor, and twenty minutes into our first meeting he said he was going to teach me some things and make me his "inmate peer counselor." He did, and I became the inmate counselor. We'd all get high, do group, and have a great time.

Like I said, I got out and caught another bid. It was at the end of that last prison term, when I was forty-two years old with nowhere to go, that I wound up in a program for ex-cons with an addiction history—and I was guided into the rooms of NA. After completing that parolee program and moving out, going to meetings, doing step work with my sponsor, taking suggestions, living the program to the "best of my present ability," I got a call from the director of that parolee program asking me if I wanted to work there as a counselor, and they would train me (I had some experience already). So I said yes and started my career as an addictions specialist, which thus far has afforded me a decent living.

The amazing thing is that all my clients were on parole, they all lived in the same place, and they all had the same parole officer. The parole officers would rotate about every year and, when I had been working there for approximately four years, I received a call from the parole office to bring my guys down so they could meet their new parole officer. So there I was, the ex-con, recovering addict, parole program counselor, meeting the new parole officer. Turns out, it was the prison drug counselor who first taught me counseling skills, who way back then saw something in me that I was incapable of seeing in myself...but God knew, and I believe He had a plan. It was a nice reunion between my ex-counselor/mentor and me. We discussed the

irony of it all, and I believe God smiled at us that day with an extra twinkle in His eye.

I'm sixty-one years old, in my nineteenth year of recovery, and this is but one of my experiences. Thank you for allowing me to share.

In loving service,
BL, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I had been wandering around playing the part of a foolish girl in a fool's game where the only prize I would win was time in jail and, eventually, my own death. After finding recovery and taking a proactive approach in my life, I was able to turn it around and find a new way to love, live, and be free.

I found myself in jail sitting in front of a rehab counselor who wanted me to comprehend that I was sick and had a problem. I, being more clever than she was, of course, made sure to make a mental note that I was not as bad off as those other women, and I didn't really need the rehabilitation program. All I knew was that in order for me to get help out of jail and perhaps a reduction in sentencing, I was going to have to somehow convince her I would benefit from the twelve-step process she taught. So I did as she requested and took inventory of my surroundings, to find a surprisingly shocking truth and unexpected reality: I was filled with fear. I had locked myself up in a place that matched what I had been feeling inside for such a long time. It was a sad, dark, lonely environment with cold, thick, impenetrable cement walls, shatterproof glass, unbreakable solid seats, flat emotionless colors. I was a stranger, only aware of pain and hurt. I started to get a feeling of panic when I realized I was in the wrong place. This was not where I wanted to be. I really did have a problem.

Several hours after being accepted into rehab, I was released with no legal complaint and pushed out the door. I was left in a state of high anxiety and foreboding about my future. I recognized my life was at a crossroad: one path led to my family and the other path led back to my old habits and routine of self-destruction. I was terrified that my family wouldn't want me back in their lives. I needed guidance, so I called the attorney my parents had hired to help me. He had just finished updating my parents about my drug problem. He told me how much my family loved me and that I should put

my trust in them. I took a chance and called my parents, asking if I could stay with them in San Diego where they were on vacation at the time. I was so grateful when they said yes because it gave me an opportunity to apologize and face them about my crime and lifestyle. The next few days with them were full of gut-wrenching realizations about the pain, heartbreak, betrayal, shame, and poison I had spread throughout my family. This reunion turned me around, allowing me to obtain a desire that burned like a wildfire from within my bleeding, broken heart to never harm myself and my family again.

I knew if I did not make a drastic change at this point I would be losing something of great value, and I was not willing to give up my life that easily. My stepfather suggested I try attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings in San Diego. He looked up several meetings on the Internet. I curiously attended my first NA meeting. Little did I know that this meeting was going to be the start of my new way of life. I had been granted the gift of desperation and I dove into the process headfirst, knowing that if I could just get through this and work the steps, somehow I would be okay. I sought my recovery like I had sought after my drugs, and deeply listened to the suggestions of the people in the program. I soon asked a woman I identified with to be my sponsor. She compassionately and lovingly held my hand through my first three steps. Her patience and kindness helped me to quickly grow and allowed me to venture out and find yet another woman who had qualities I did not yet understand but that I desired to have in my life. Working my steps with my second sponsor has proved to be more challenging. I am opening up in areas of myself I had long thought were closed off, and in some areas I didn't even know existed.

The people in this fellowship have generously opened their hearts, welcomed me home. They tell me to keep coming back and they take the time to listen to me when I am hurting or happy and want a friend. I go to events and do service work. I listen to suggestions, lead, share, volunteer, accept commitments, and invite others I find along my way. I understand the language that sounded foreign to me upon my arrival, and I ask questions, trying to feed my spirit with the wise words and experiences of those who came before me. I have been successful in achieving a new way of life. I stick with the winners and people I see making positive changes in their lives and the lives of others. I was promised a new way of life, free from

active addiction, and, just for today, I have it. I have a humble job and I get to attend college. My family is astonished at my new behaviors and so very happy with all my accomplishments. Their support has been amazing through this whole process. My biological father, who lives in Hawaii, has even been able to hear the change within me and decided to start walking on a path of recovery, too. It is a miracle and a blessing that my higher power has granted me even the smallest amount of time with him being clean. I enjoy having him back in my life just for today and being able to talk to him about our recovery. The greatest gift is the gift of time; it is the one thing we are unable to take back. Time is a cherished blessing; I am now wise about how and with whom I spend it.

I take moments to turn myself within, focused on my breathing. With each breath in, I inhale deeply and recognize the oxygen coming in through my nose, expanding and filling my lungs, bringing me a gift of life and love as it fills my body and nourishes my being. As I exhale, I notice I can't hold onto it or keep it. I must let go and release it, trusting there will be more.

I have learned that in order to change my life, I must first change my thinking. I have taken positive steps to obtain my goals and continue to take steps toward reaching my dreams. I have found my new home here in San Diego among my new associates who share similar hopes and desires, are of service to our community, and are moving in positive directions. My life isn't perfect, and I still have problems to work on and flaws I struggle with. I take what I can from each experience and move on to the next. This process has helped me to do my best and, when that is not enough, let it go and know that I am not expected to be perfect or anything more than a twenty-nine-year-old girl who is enjoying the journey of life one step at a time, learning to love, play, laugh, and be free with the other children on this playground named Earth. Thanks to NA, I am the change I wish to see in the world.

Sincerely with love,
JB, California



“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 \$ _____.

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(PLEASE type or print clearly)

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