

# 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](mailto:fsmail@na.org).*

This issue contains a new tool on page 7 designed for incarcerated addicts; this is meant to help make *Reaching Out* submissions easier. Work is underway on similar tools for H&I members and other NA members on the outside.

Look for these tools in future issues of *Reaching Out*, *The NA Way Magazine*, and on our website  
[http://www.na.org/reaching\\_out/index.htm](http://www.na.org/reaching_out/index.htm).

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

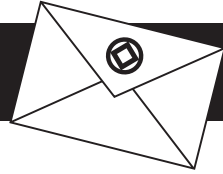


Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
January 2011	15 October 2010
April 2011	15 January 2011
July 2011	15 April 2011
October 2011	15 July 2011



# FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am a recovering addict who has been in and out of the rooms of recovery since 1999. On 9 February 2008 God did for me what I couldn't do for myself. That day I was arrested and given a three-year sentence. By the grace of my Higher Power, I have been able to get back to the rooms. I have learned to apply the spiritual principles of NA to my life and practice the Twelve Steps in all of my affairs.

I have a sponsor and a willingness to work the Twelve Steps. I started steps with my last sponsor, but was transferred to another facility. This facility doesn't have any NA literature. My sponsor at the previous institution suggested I write to NA World Services. I saw your *Reaching Out* publication and the offer for a free subscription. I have come to understand my recovery is only as strong as my foundation, and that foundation is formed through the literature and a working knowledge of the Twelve Steps.

I want recovery the NA way through connectedness and unity this time. I am humble enough to ask for help from the fellowship. I've had a few people ask me to sponsor them. With 20 months clean and a working knowledge of the Twelve Steps, I accepted. Today I thank God for saving my life and the program for showing me how to live life, Just for Today.

A grateful addict,  
DR, Ohio

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JM, and I'm an addict. I have been clean for 15 years, 10 months, and 2 days. About three years ago I was sick of sponsorship and service work, and withdrew from all committees I was on. I decided to take my will and life back. I switched addictions. I traded drugs for money! Thus began my decline. I am now in a segregated institution. I recall what an older man in the program told me: "Anything you put before your program, you will lose." Wow! I lost money, freedom, seeing my kids, my business—the list goes on.

I did not lose my clean date. Through it all, I would still go to meetings, but I was not honest with others or myself. Greed got me. Now I have no access to meetings. I have checked out a Basic Text (that I must return) and received a few IPs from NAWS. I am eager to get moved from this unit. All I know for sure is that I need to do a ton of work on my spirituality. Always remember one vital thing: Cleantime does not equal recovery!

I trust my Higher Power; I will get through this clean. That is one thing I have learned in 15+ years. I love NA!

JM, Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is TM, and I'm an addict. This is my first attempt at recovery. My behavior while I was on drugs landed me in jail. I never thought I was "that bad" or addicted to drugs. It was, however, a lifestyle that consumed me and became a part of my identity. I have been arrested numerous times for possession and only got probation and misdemeanor charges. I justified this as a cost of being who I was. At one point, I thought suicide was the only answer; at the last second I changed my mind.

To make a long story short, I cleaned up in jail. That was a year ago. About four months ago somebody showed me an NA book. At first I thought, "NA is not for me, I don't do narcotics." I read the first half of this book and saw myself on those pages. I found out that the classification of a drug doesn't matter. Addiction doesn't depend on the drugs. All drugs have the power to change me. I was transferred to prison before I got to finish the book.

For almost 20 years drugs ran my life, and I want it back. I know your program works or it wouldn't still be there. *Reaching Out* is for people like me. Thank you for everything; you have been my rehab.

TM, Texas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is AC, and I am a recovering addict. I am truly grateful to my Higher Power for making it simple for me. In NA the literature says, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using." This program works regardless of sex, creed, race, or religion. Most of all, there are no dues or fees.

NA is a place where I can be accepted just as I am. One of the hardest things I have had to do is find a Higher Power of my own understanding. Being rigorously honest is also difficult for me. I just want my Higher Power to help me regain some of the things I have lost and help my desire to stop using.

I could resume the fight again, or be willing to completely surrender, admitting my defeat. I wonder, "Can my Higher Power completely remove the obsession to use again?" My Higher Power works by giving me just what I need. If I keep following the guidance and suggestions of this program, my Higher Power can handle this cunning and powerful disease. I surrender!

AC, Arizona



San Quentin State Prison in California recently celebrated 26 years of NA behind the walls, and *Reaching Out* was there!

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Who would have ever thought that I would be excited to go to San Quentin? Big, bad San Quentin is one of the most infamous and feared lockdowns ever. I have been in and out of several institutions, but now, as a member of Narcotics Anonymous, I had the opportunity to go to San Quentin and then leave the same day! I was going to celebrate the anniversary of their NA meeting on the inside.

This facility is the home of one of the longest-running institutional group NA meetings in the country. After three checkpoints, we made it into the main yard where the meetings are held. The meeting had a speaker-and-participation format, but NA members from the outside (that's me) were given a chance to share for five to ten minutes. I made my time count for these guys; I could see the enthusiasm for recovery in their eyes. I gave my *Reaching Out* pitch, and got a great response.

I took away from this experience a newfound respect for our brothers and sisters on the inside. It takes that overwhelming desire to stay clean; it is a gift to do it behind the walls. I've been in there before, doing wrong. To live right in a house full of wrong takes fortitude. To my brothers and sisters: Stay strong, and keep that desire. We'll keep the lights on. This addict will always keep you in his prayers.

GW, California

**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.

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

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Tell us about your first NA meeting. \_\_\_\_\_

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

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How has NA changed you? \_\_\_\_\_

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What does being an NA member mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_

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

Please send your story to:  
**NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409**



# FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is BL, and I am a recovering addict. I was brought up in the Bronx, in a middle-class family. My father was a construction worker, and my 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 and I didn't fit in with the other kids. I wasn't good at sports, and wasn't that bright academically. I just didn't belong!

There was an older kid who lived across the street; he was a loner, 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. I smoked my first joint with him. 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 the progression of the disease is like. My family moved to a different neighborhood in Queens. I met others who were doing drugs, and proceeded to do it as much as I could. The lifestyle of getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more took over. 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 for 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. From the age of nine to the age of 42, I spent 17 years behind the walls of state prisons. I also spent approximately two years 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!

I went from a maximum-security-status inmate to a medium-security-status inmate and 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. I never told them I had a drug problem. I didn't want to be there, but it was the only medium-security bed available, so there I was. When I realized that all the addicts were in that unit, and that was where the contraband was, I quickly signed up for the drug program. For the first time in my using history I admitted to someone else that I was an addict.

I didn't get clean then; I continued to use for another six years. I was convicted of a fifth felony. But the seed of recovery was planted. From my perspective in recovery, I see that the hand of God was beginning to work in my life. In 1983 I met the addictions counselor when I signed up, and 20 minutes into our first meeting he said to me that 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 loaded and do group and have a great time. Like I said, I got out that time, and caught another bid. At the end of that last prison term, I was 42 years old with nowhere to go. I wound up in a program for ex-cons with an addiction history, and was guided into the rooms of NA.

After completing that parolee program, I moved out. I was going to meetings, doing step work with my sponsor, taking suggestions, and living the program to the best of my ability. I got a call from the director of that parole program, asking me if I wanted to work there as a counselor. He said they would train me, since I had some experience. So I said "yes" and started my career as an addictions specialist, which, thus far, has afforded me a decent living. All my clients were on parole, and because they all lived in the same place, they had the same parole officer. The parole officers would rotate about once every year.

I had been working there for approximately four years when something amazing happened. 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 who turned out to be the very same ex-drug counselor who first taught me counseling skills! Way back then, he saw something in me that I was incapable of seeing in myself. God knew, and I believe He had a plan.

It was a nice reunion between me and my ex-counselor and mentor; we discussed the irony of it all. I believe God smiled at us that day with an extra twinkle in His eye. I'm now 61 years old, and am in my 19th year of recovery. Thank you for allowing me to share.

BL, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is KN, and I'm an addict. I clearly remember the day I was raided for the second time. I had just seen my connection and had a large quantity of drugs sitting in a safe in my room. I told the cops that the room was actually rented out by someone else, and that the dope was not mine. Needless to say, they did not buy my story and I was going to the county jail ... again.

The previous two times I had been arrested, I had been able to post bail within hours. I have a wonderful mother who has always been there to bail me out, but not on this arrest. The local police department was sick of me dealing drugs in my hometown, so they put a hold on my bail. I had to show proof that my bail money actually came from verifiable sources and was not drug money. This time my mom also said no. So began my trip to prison, and my recovery.

I remember my last day using was actually inside. I decided that I was going to sleep my time away. I managed to stay loaded for a few days. Somewhere along the way, I was no longer able to sleep. I was kept awake with restless legs that twitched and hurt. There I was, locked in a cell. I realized that I was still trying to get out of myself by getting high. Getting high had finally stopped working. I was still left with myself, alone in my bunk, disgusted with where my life had gone.

My clean date is 13 August 2003. The day I switched institutions, I had a moment of clarity. I was sitting on a bus, shackled. I remember telling myself that I could not use anymore. I was going to a new facility to start fire camp training; I decided I wanted to stay healthy and not get high. Sometimes when I listen to other people share about their moment of surrender, I am instantly taken back to that bus ride, and I feel grateful for my Higher Power's love.

As my story goes, I gained some weight during my incarceration. Due to my weight, I was not able to fulfill the requirements for fire camp. So the institution transferred me out of fire camp and put me

into the kitchen to work the morning shift. They also moved me to another housing unit. I was very unhappy.

There were these rumors going around that inmates enrolled in some program were going to have their time reduced to only 35 percent of their original sentence! "Wow," I thought, "this is for me!" So I marched over to sign up. The counselor who talked to me specifically asked if I wanted to be in recovery and wanted to be clean. I had no idea what that meant—till I could think about was the possibility that I could get out early, so I said yes. My Higher Power really loves me. Today, I believe that he puts messages in my life coded in such a way that I hear them!

I had a counselor who recognized that I was an addict. To this day, I am so grateful. He copied pages from the *Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides* for me, and I sat on my bunk and wrote. I read him my inventory, and he taught me about the spiritual principle of forgiveness, specifically self-forgiveness. Around that time, I discovered there was a new furlough program that would allow me to serve the last four months of my sentence outside this institution. Once again, my Higher Power was putting into action for me a sequence of events that would lead me down the right path.

I went to treatment and I heard what I needed. There were counselors who showed me the steps again and let me know that NA has a place for me. There were NA panels that came into this treatment center, and these members shared their stories of prison and where they were now. I heard the message of hope.

The day that I paroled was the same day that I left treatment. I had the option to stay for another two months or come back to my county where I was paroled. I made the choice to come back to my county; I was scared. I was afraid that all the people I knew would come and hunt me down and drag me back to the hell that I had escaped. I was afraid that I would end up back in prison. In that treatment center, I learned that I need to attend meetings in order to stay clean. I knew freedom from active addiction meant that I had a chance at staying out of jail.

I hit a meeting the day I paroled, and continued to hit meetings every day for the first 30 days out of prison. I had over a year clean, but I was a newcomer. Today, I understand that a newcomer is a person who is new to knowing how to live without the use of drugs, and even though I had that year clean, I was still a newcomer. After

60 days, my mother allowed me to move back in. I was scared; I was coming home to the old playground. So I did what I knew best: I hit a meeting.

For the next two years life got busy. I went to meetings and learned a new way of life. When my old friends stopped by my house, they got the same response from me: "I am clean and a member of NA. Here, have a meeting directory." Every once in a while some of these people would actually show up, and I am happy to say there are several people I used with who are clean today. I understand that I can't go back and get others clean, but if an old friend shows up in a meeting I welcome them. I give them a warm hug, introduce them to people, and let them know that NA works and has a home for them.

I am so grateful that my Higher Power knew that I needed to be locked in a cell. I needed to stop long enough to hear the message of recovery. I have been out of prison for five years and some months; I continue to go to NA meetings, work steps, and do service.

NA has afforded me so much change that the prison lifestyle is part of my past, not my future. Today, through NA, I am a responsible, decent woman of this earth!

KN, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

May this note find you in gratitude, health, and honesty this day! One single day has many opportunities to be happier, learn, and discover who we are in our hearts. This happens through the spiritual principles, healing, and God-awareness revealed in the Twelve Steps. Steps have shown me many situations where I believed an illusion. What truly defines me is when I feel that connection with my inner Higher Power. In the eyes of your God, you're enough, perfect, and unconditionally loved.

Now, everything good that I have is because of my first NA meeting ten years ago. It is so important to have at least one person to talk to, and to not feel alone. One time my sponsor said, "If you're going through hell, don't stop!" That is so true; many times, sincere surrender and acceptance was all I needed. It is hard to see for yourself, so you need a sponsor. When I finally surrendered, the grace came. I thought, "What was I so worried about?" NA taught me all I know, and gave me all I have.

I have freedom because I know all I ever wanted to feel will always be in my heart, not in my head. I know lasting peace is inside. Using was just a way to run away, and the Twelve Steps of NA showed me that. Humility is important, too. When I have a problem with someone else's behavior, it's usually me, although it sure seems like them. This disease is real; I hate the disease, not the person.

Thank you for sharing your stories in *Reaching Out*; you all have made a huge difference in my happiness. I am a felon and have been incarcerated 14 times. At four years clean I went to jail over old wreckage from my past. *Reaching Out* has been there for me. The blessings are always on the way! All we have to do is align ourselves to receive them.

Try to be grateful, honest, and caring about yourself and others. I am grateful for so many things today. My life is transformed. Not only do I have food, clothing, shelter, water, heat, and soap; I have regained my senses and my health, my brain works better, people care about me, and I care about me. I have dignity and, most of all, hope. The Twelve Steps of NA can take you there!

Blessings,  
IJ, Indiana

## ART FROM THE OUTSIDE

*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.



*Logo from the Tri-Cities Area of NA, Washington State*

If you would like to see your art from the outside printed here, please send jpegs or pdf files to [H&I@na.org](mailto:H&I@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*.
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