

Volume 28, Number 3

Reaching Out

July 2013



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Reaching out is the beginning of the struggle that will set us free. It will break down the walls that imprison us. A symptom of our disease is alienation, and honest sharing will free us to recover.

Basic Text, "Recovery and Relapse"

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.

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
October 2013	15 July 2013
January 2014	15 October 2013
April 2014	15 February 2014
July 2014	15 April 2014



From the Inside

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is Dr. H and I have been a psychologist in the state of Florida since 1990. I am presently institutionalized in a facility in Florida. I was a pot smoker from the age of 13, partied during my teens, and continued into my 40s. I was involved in a car accident on Valentine's Day the week of my divorce hearing. As a result, I wound up in pain management and at a psychiatrist's office. That was the beginning of the spiraling until the consequences of my behaviors—a deterioration in judgment, decision making and care—took over. I attempted suicide during this time, and was monitored, arrested, and eventually imprisoned. Thank God for the fellowship and the women who bring NA into the rooms behind the gates. What a wonderful program. Ironically, I am at peace, and have been abstinent from pain medications for over a year and from everything else for four months now. I do not believe I would have accomplished all of this without the NA way of life.

HB, FL

Dear Reaching Out,

I just got the October *Reaching Out* and I'm really surprised that it was forwarded to me, as I have changed institutions. I would like to talk a little about what H&I has done for me while I've been a member of the Fellowship of NA. I found the fellowship while doing time in an Oregon institution in 1988–89 after starting to go to meetings there. There was one meeting in the visiting room with H&I sponsors on a weeknight, and one meeting was a drop-in open meeting on Sunday mornings with coffee and doughnuts. Boy, that sure got newcomers to come, at least a few times. You know how we dope fiends like our coffee and sweets.

Anyway, at the beginning of my relationship with NA, I thought most members had to be lying about being clean as long as they

claimed to be. Or, I figured they must not have been the kind of addict I was or they would not have been clean that long. Well, after being around awhile, I came to start believing that at least some of these people, at least part of the time were staying clean. And, in this process, I was learning that I was not nearly as special as I thought. As I stayed around awhile, I started learning some things about myself "without" really doing any real step work, "to the best of my ability"! Anyhow, I was released and found myself reinstitutionalized within a year because I thought I knew it all. After all, I went to many meetings on the inside. With my subsequent release in late 2008 at the age of 54, I was using again within a few months, even though I had promised my new family that I wouldn't return to drugs. This family tried to save me by loving me in a sharing and caring way. I ended up hating everyone who cared about me, and by returning to prison again I was hurting countless people in the process.

Well, now I'm 61, and it may sound really strange, but I am "freer" now than I've ever been in my whole life. Sure, I wish at times I could get another chance at an outside life, but I feel my HP, whom I care to call Grandfather, is taking care of my needs and helping me to open up my heart and learn a new way to live. I not only go to meetings, I also now do step work "to the best of my ability." This time around I truly care about other addicts and want to at least try to help them to not make some of the same mistakes I've made, and maybe, just maybe, they will not have to spend their lives as I have behind bars or cell doors of one kind or another.

I had the pleasure of meeting and learning to truly love another male recovering addict the NA way. He was the main reason we even had meetings in that institution. Most times he came in alone, and I know that's a big no-no for H&I sponsors who come in to meetings, but nothing negative ever happened. I do understand why you guys don't want H&I members coming in alone, but we had and, as far as I know, still have a very strong core group. The member who was coming in carrying the message suffered a fatal

heart attack. He will always be an inspiration to me in my new walk because of my being able to get to know him. I still cry when I think of the loss to other addicts because of the way he carried the message he was able to share with others in his 30+ years clean.

I know I have rambled in this letter, but I wanted you to know your foot soldiers are out here in our prisons and are helping to change the lives of those who have the courage to try. John A, the H&I member, told me you cannot think your way into a new way of living, but you can live your way into a new way of thinking. And one of the biggest things I feel that we need to change as addicts is our thinking and what we do with those thoughts. One of the reasons I wrote about John A was that I've been trying to figure out a way for someone from NA to stand up in Philly and let the world of recovering addicts know just how much you H&I guys mean to us behind bars.

BC, WA

Editor's Note: Unity Day is being celebrated Sunday, 1 September, in Philadelphia. We anticipate more than 100 prisons participating on the call and listening to the message of recovery.

Dear Reaching Out,

I am currently in a drug treatment and department of corrections facility. I was clean before I arrived at this facility because of the Fellowship of NA. I was "white knuckling" my recovery; I was clean but unhappy. I wasn't working the steps and didn't have a sponsor. I was going because I needed that connection, like I was part of something great. Drugs had taken everything from me, and I was spiritually bankrupt. My past finally caught up with me and I was incarcerated. I chair NA meetings on the inside here and have six sponsees. I have started the steps and have just finished my Fourth Step. It was life-changing, and I can't stress enough to the guys in here how important it is to thoroughly work the steps. My life is on track, and I have the

balance I've been looking for. I still have a way to go, but I wanted to share what NA and the fellowship have done, can do, and will do for you, for all.

Grateful NA member,
J from MO

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is Frank H and I am an addict. I was first introduced to the NA Fellowship over ten years ago. I came, got a cup of coffee, and left. Years later, I returned. I stayed in NA for a while and got some keytags, began working the steps, and eventually returned to active addiction. I lacked willingness to face my fears and my past. When the going got tough, I got going. That's been my pattern for as long as I can remember. In my early attempts at recovery, I sought out all the differences, saying "I am not like him" or "I'll never use a needle" or "I am a social user." Each time I returned to using to find out I wasn't so strong. I'd use anyway, anywhere. I became what I said I would never be.

Two years ago I was arrested for a drug offense. Looking back on that day, now I am grateful for my Higher Power's divine intervention. I was inches from death. Those handcuffs saved my life. Because I was a first-time felon, the judge imposed long-term prison-based treatment. Eager and finally willing, I applied myself. I started an NA group here in the prison. We now meet five times per week, and our meetings continue to grow in attendance. Thank you to NA World Services for our literature! Practicing Step Twelve and working with others have improved the quality of my life.

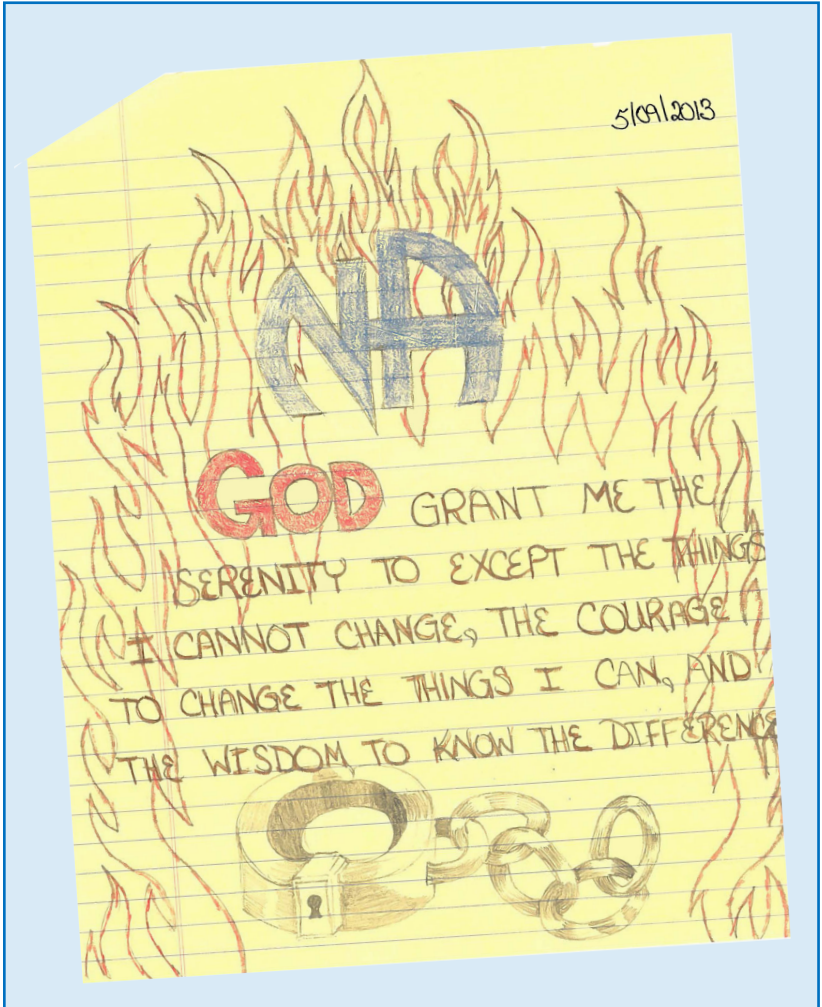
I am now three months from parole. I've got a meeting schedule, a phone list, and a fresh new start. Prison initially took away the drugs, but it's been NA and my own hard work that have kept me from returning to them. Today I have my family back in my life. I am slowly building back their trust, I am reaching goals, and my character continues to be refined. Someone once asked me who I am. Today, I have the freedom to create that. One day at a time. Free on the inside.

FH, ID

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 jpeg or pdf files to Handl@na.org or mail to: Reaching Out; c/o NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409.





From the Outside

Dear Reaching Out,

I first became familiar with this newsletter when I was in the Georgia prison system. I actually had a letter “From the Inside” published back then. I’ve been out on parole for almost two years now with no violations. I give all the credit to God and how I used my time on the inside. That was when I established a strong program of recovery. I prayed, did morning meditations, hung with the winners, and, most importantly, worked the steps. When I was released, I was spiritually fit. I found my freedom long before my release.

I continued the same things upon release. One of the first things I did was find a meeting. I’ve since moved to Tennessee, where I’m originally from, to be close to family and work in my family’s business. My life is good today. I recently got my driver’s license back. I haven’t been legal to drive since 2001. I still go to meetings, at least three per week when my home group meets, and more out of town when I can. I guess the point I’m trying to make is that this program works no matter where you are or whatever your circumstances. I know today that prison’s not the end of the world. For me, it was a new beginning, so for anyone on the inside, hang in there; it gets better. And for anyone about to get released, there is life after prison.

DB, TN

Dear Reaching Out,

I’m an addict and my name is LA. Today, by God’s grace and the program of Narcotics Anonymous, I have 18 years and ten months clean, and I have been doing H&I service ever since I had one year clean. Presently I serve as vice chair for the Greater New York Regional H&I Committee and I also serve as a panel leader for a New York Area H&I Committee.

My reason for getting involved in H&I service is to just give back what was so freely given to me. When at the end of my road I could no longer function with or without the drugs, I ended up in detox. That evening an H&I presentation was held, and I was able to raise my hand and admit for the first time in my life, after 30 years of active addiction, that I was an addict. My journey started then, and I got some hope that just maybe I could stay clean a day at a time.

I told myself after coming home and making meetings that maybe one day I could carry the message that was carried to me. After staying clean for one year, I got that opportunity, and the impact of doing H&I service in my recovery has been amazing. Going into various facilities and sharing with addicts that any addict can lose the desire to use and find a new way to live has taken my recovery to another place.

One of the most memorable experiences I've had carrying the message was sharing my story at an all-male facility. Prior to getting clean, I worked as a corrections officer for ten years. In the end, after using all day and night and having to get to work at 6 am, I wanted to sell my off-duty revolver for one more high. I got to work only to be suspended because I refused to take a drug test. Not long after my suspension, I got arrested and sent to jail and was processed by people I had trained. There was a gentleman at that facility where I shared the message of recovery who was also a corrections officer and identified with the pain. Today he is clean eight years and doing H&I service as well. I'm so grateful to be a member of Narcotics Anonymous and glad to be of service.

LA, NY

Dear Reaching Out,

Hello, I am an addict and my name is V. Today, I'm recovering from the disease of addiction only through the grace of God and the program of Narcotics Anonymous, and for that I am truly grateful. I was born and raised in Newburgh, New York. I grew up in a dysfunctional family whose parents were functioning

alcoholics. This family environment and the neighborhood I lived in set the course for my addiction to influence my behavior.

My story before finding NA was like any other addict's. I lived to use and used to live, always finding ways and means to get more. This obsessive and compulsive behavior was the path of my addiction. From an early age, my addiction resulted in many incarcerations in youth institutions, and later mostly short-term bouts in local jails and six prison bouts.

After serving my last prison sentence, I was released in May 1999. During the time of my last incarceration, I still hadn't surrendered to my disease of addiction. Unfortunately, I was still in a state of denial. I found myself a job working in a hospital food service department. I was convinced that social acceptability was the answer to my recovery. I worked in the food service area for 18 months and then was transferred to the operating room as an OR assistant. I remained in this position for five years before my complacent mind told me I could drink again. The drinking led to the drug of my choice and eventually I was terminated from my job. For the next four years I developed a pattern of using compulsively and acting out unmanageable behavior. Through the grace of God I was finally arrested for a seventh-degree possession charge and sentenced to 90 days in a county jail.

This was my moment of truth. It was during this period that I heard the message of NA without any reservations. Through this message, I learned I was powerless over my addiction. Upon my release, I signed myself into an outpatient treatment program and simultaneously joined the Fellowship of NA. This was the beginning of my recovery journey. I decided at this point I would do whatever was necessary to maintain my recovery. With God, NA, and a support network in my life, my life started to get better. If you're listening, listen well: There is no doubt that NA and a relationship with God have been the most significant factors that have kept me clean and recovering from my addiction. Today, I have almost five years of living and practicing the NA program.

I encourage every addict to give themselves a break and take a chance to find out what Narcotics Anonymous can do for their life. It is a program written so simply that we can follow it in our daily lives.

V, NY

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is G and I am an addict. My first contact with NA behind the walls was in New York. It wasn't until my last sentence that I was receptive and tried to open my mind to NA. The fact that I was going to NA by my own free will while on the inside helped me with my transition to NA on the outside, and even though I suffer from anxiety and other issues, I finally got very comfortable. At my first NA meeting on the outside, I was guarded, acting hard and hiding my nerves with a tough-guy act, but I still got enough from the meeting to keep coming back.

I don't have to self-medicate; I have direction and self-respect. I am in college and do H&I, but I intend to be a social worker because I know how frustrating life can be when you are lost. My first service experience with H&I was awkward, but it gave me a chance to see myself in other people and feel good about reaching out. An impact that H&I work has had on my recovery has been to help keep me on point and teach me responsibility. It has also helped me to remember where I have been and how dark it was. A particular H&I experience I would like to share is when I saw a woman who I was friends with who told me about a PTSD trauma center, and I went for the hell of it — and it changed my life. Recently I saw her out of control again, and it broke my heart. I would like to say to addicts on the inside that you can't change the past, you can't control the weather, you can't control or change anybody but yourself, so make peace with the world and peace with yourself and heal by changing — which is scary, but so worth it.

Thank you, G

ART FROM THE TO THE SIDE

Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented H&I t-shirts. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act and art. Please share your H&I t-shirt pictures with us! We would like to showcase your art. HandI@na.org





Unity Day Call

Narcotics Anonymous World Convention Sunday, 1 September 2013

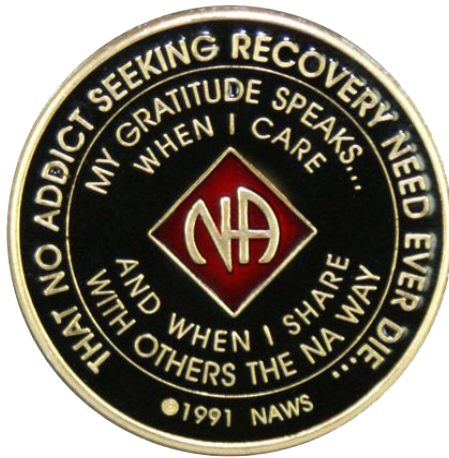
There is still time for your institution to join, via phone link, in the celebration of recovery at the World Convention of NA, Sunday, 1 September 2013. NA offers this free service to institutions; the recovery meeting call will last 2 hours (11:30 am–1:30 pm EST). Inmates will be able to hear the readings and speakers at the closing meeting of the convention.

This is an opportunity to make a connection to the worldwide NA Fellowship and hear the powerful message of recovery. All that is required is a standard telephone line. If you are a large institutional group, we suggest that a speaker system be connected to the phone. We look forward to you all joining us! Presently we anticipate 100 institutions, possibly more, on the call, which means more than 7,500 inmates will be hearing this message of recovery.

If your institution or your NA volunteer is interested in participating, please contact Colin C at 818.773.9999 ext 125, or colinc@na.org. We can answer your questions and help you sign up. We look forward to you joining us!

Cut-off date for registration is 1 August.





“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 \$32.60 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* @ \$32.60 each, total \$ _____.

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Reaching Out

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