

Reaching Out



Volume 24, Number 4

October 2009

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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.

Work is underway to make *Reaching Out* submissions even easier. Once developed, these tools will be introduced in *Reaching Out*, *The NA Way Magazine*, and our website http://www.na.org/reaching_out/index.htm.

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

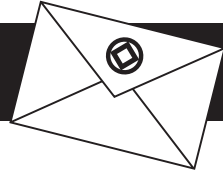


Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

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



FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is LC and I am an on death row. I am also proud to say that I am an addict. It has been almost eleven years since I last saw the streets, and to be honest, these have been the best years in a long while for me. I started using at the age of twelve, and from there my life became a living hell. From gangs to using, I was blind to the fact that I was on a one-way road to total self-destruction.

Many think that being in my situation is the end of life as we know it. On a more positive note, I have actually finally found the peace that for so long I was searching for in a little baggie and pipe. I have found that these past eleven years have been the best. I have accomplished so much behind these walls. I finished school, became engaged to my fiancée, and developed a closer relationship with my nineteen-year-old daughter. I now possess these things and so much more. Even though I'm a condemned inmate, never likely to go home, it's still refreshing to know that I am clean. Of course, there are drugs here in prison, but why on earth would I for any reason step back into such destructive behavior that brought me to this point in my life? That is not an option.

I want to thank NA for the help they have been to me. We are not allowed to go to meetings due to the security status of this unit, but your books and encouragement have been the source of my clean time. It was rough doing it without a sponsor, and I sure wish that I had one to celebrate my birthdays with, but a visit from the very ones I hurt and who have forgiven me is all I really need. Thank you, NA. I am forever indebted to you. I have found life on death row.

LC, Oregon

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, I'm a recovering addict named S. Thought I'd drop you folks a line to let you know how I've been doing during my past year of incarceration.

I've really wanted to put something out to others who may read this and who are doing time, too, and that's most important. Don't lose hope. I've been working my steps with my sponsor on the street for the past year. I'm now on Step Five and am finding it difficult to interact with my sponsor in the way that I'd like to and that I have grown accustomed to in the numerous times I've worked the steps in the many years I had clean before this relapse. My point is, no matter how difficult things get where we're at, we need to hang onto the tools we're given in recovery and the hope we get from the fellowship, our sponsors, and our higher power.

I know for me it gets very challenging in here sometimes, and it would be much easier just to hang it up until I hit the street, but I also know that for me, to use is to die. I don't think I'd survive another relapse, and I've been given another chance at life here, so why blow it? I'm very grateful to that power for this chance, even though things don't always go my way and I never know what they're going to throw at me next. I'm coming up on my first year clean in here and I'm proud of myself for staying clean and working a program in the face of all this adversity. There's plenty of stuff around to relapse with; I'm just glad I don't have to, just for today. Peace.

SD, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I began this road of recovery 11 February 2006. When I first got to the rooms I was scared for many reasons. But the more I came back, the more comfortable I got. I began to speak up in meetings, and I asked someone to be my temporary sponsor just to help me get started on my steps. Then I was on fire for this thing called recovery. I was sharing and caring the NA way for two years. Then, on 22 February 2008, I was incarcerated for choices I made in the past. It was my Higher Power's way of answering my prayers on how to make an impossible amends: by taking responsibility for my actions, a lesson I learned from working the steps.

After I went to prison, all my recovery stopped. While I was in reception there were no meetings for me. There were plenty of ad-

dicts but none practicing recovery. The sponsor I had wouldn't return my mail. I felt lost and alone. I tried to rely on my Higher Power for strength, but it was to no avail because after I had eight months of turning down drugs and alcohol in jail, my disease returned in the form of depression, self-centeredness, and resentment toward those who I felt had betrayed me. But it was no one's fault but my own. After eight months of saying no, the old patterns and survival instinct kicked in and I relapsed. Doing what I thought would make things better — believing the lies my head told me — only made things worse. I felt like I had let my only friends (J and M), my family, and myself down for what I had done. I talked to my friend, M, and she helped me see that getting right back in recovery by any means necessary was the strongest thing for me to do for myself, so I did. I began to pray more for God's will for me.

I was then moved from reception to another institution that has no meetings. But my connection with my Higher Power is stronger than ever. My only source of recovery is letters from my friends and three books that my two best friends bought me. Until I parole I'm still in search of other recovering addicts and a new sponsor. Life is good because I have seven months clean today and I didn't use yesterday or today and I have tomorrow to look forward to. Recovery in jail for me is almost nonexistent without other recovering addicts to share it with. It almost feels like being back in my disease but without the drug use. I'm just speaking from experience, but I need these rooms to be open in here and to get some guidance from a loving sponsor and support from caring friends. That's what makes my recovery work.

LH, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Here I find myself after thirteen years of cleantime in an inpatient treatment center. I ended up one more time homeless and losing all that God blessed me with. But I share this because I am grateful for where I am right now. For an addict it takes more than to just stop using; we must do work in order to recover. This is an inside job. If we as addicts do not work on our insides, we are doomed to repeat our cycle of addiction.

I found myself running on self-will, not utilizing my sponsor and my network, and as a result, here I sit in a treatment facility. The

“not-yets” became a part of my story: jails and institutions. I was introduced to the penal system as a result of using.

It was devastating to me, as a mother, for my children to see me in that position. It took only a few months after picking back up for me to end up homeless and facing yet another charge. This disease of addiction is a powerful one. But we can and do recover. It is important to reach out as soon as possible.

Don't let shame, guilt, and humiliation keep you in the darkness. There is hope after relapse. Pick yourself up, dust off, and call someone. The hand of NA is always there to welcome you. It doesn't matter what your story is. They know you and walk with you on the path to a new way of life.

Grateful for change,
TJ, Maryland

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict name DT. I would like to say thank you for bringing *Reaching Out* and the message of recovery to me and my fellows. And what is our message? The message is that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. Our message is hope and the promise of freedom. I have been caught in the grips of my addiction for over three-quarters of my thirty-eight years. I've been in and out of the rooms of recovery, rehab, and detox as well. I have heard the message of recovery for years, but for once in my life I'm actually listening and starting to do some work. I read the literature daily and am now starting to come into an understanding of the program for myself. I thank the God of my understanding for the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. Thank you.

DT, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is FG and I'm an addict. I am incarcerated for the fifth time. This is my first time saying I am an addict. I went to my first NA meeting in jail. It felt good to tell everybody. I wish I would have done it sooner. I have given my life to my higher power and I'm happy. I will get released in about twenty-two days. I plan to continue going to meetings upon my release. I am thirty-one years

old and have been an addict since I was thirteen. I have five kids, and I love them to death. I know I can't do it without the NA meetings and my higher power. I love the *Reaching Out* magazine. Today was my first time reading it. I just want to tell the readers to continue with the meetings, because if I can do it, anybody can. I have been clean for forty-five days now. Thank you.

FG, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Another day down while sitting in an eight-man cell in prison. I go by T and I am currently doing my second term. I'm twenty years old and I've been dealing with this addiction for almost six years of my life. My parents were addicts and are no longer in my life due to this disease. Because of my choices I am no longer in my daughter's life, either.

I have struggled with NA for a couple years, once getting clean for ten months, only to lose it all to boredom. It's important for me, as an addict, to work the steps and to share my strength and hope to stay clean. I find myself remembering that this process is done one day at a time, so easy does it. Keep coming back, because it works if you work it.

TP, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am a relatively new member. I first walked into a meeting at around twenty-two years of age, not being very open, holding onto self-reliance among other things, and having built up fronts and attitudes; but the holding hands and the Serenity Prayer topped it! In my mind I thought, "Wow. What kind of cult have I joined? Did I sign anything when I walked in? Can I go now? Why are people holding my hands?" You get the message!

None of my plans have ever come to fruition. I have a forklift license that I never used. That's as far as my career ever got. Most of my early twenties included jails, detoxes, and rehabs. I was lost for a very long time. I now believe addiction to be a disease. I've done my share of programs as well; I am in another detox now at thirty years of age. I have a five-year-old daughter and a girlfriend whom I love and want to marry. We have used for the last six years

together, for many sick reasons, one being that I was afraid that if we got clean, our relationship might not survive. Was it fear that kept me using for a long while? Yeah, nice codependent, drug-addicted couple with a gorgeous little girl.

I just want to say I see an answer in NA for me. For so long I have not been able to see an answer, a way out. I will see you when I get there. I am so grateful for my sponsor lending me his faith and belief so I can believe in me.

Thank you; I'm C and I haven't used today.

CA, Australia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is CU and I'm an addict. Years ago I was active in the program of NA. I was a part of my home group. (I believe the only excuse for not showing up to your home group is a funeral... your own.) I was a part of my area for years and held practically every position. I was a part of the regional H&I subcommittee, and later represented my region at the World Service Conference. I worked steps and others worked steps with me. I worked in the local community as an addiction counselor. I took H&I meetings inside local hospitals, jails, and three prisons. That's not counting being a husband and a father. I was respected for who I was.

Now I'm writing from a segregation unit inside the walls for a write-up for a dirty urine analysis. I've been locked up for nearly nine years now. Only one and a half years after I relapsed, I came to the exact place where I had brought NA meetings every week for years. In these nine years I've overdosed nine times and have had five dirty urines. The last overdose was August 2008, and it put me in the hospital for two weeks, most of that in ICU with pulmonary edema because I had choked on my own vomit. When I came to with wires and tubes all over my body, I couldn't believe I was there again, and it seemed more serious this time.

I got back to the prison and eventually got out of the hole. It's tough here when it comes to drugs, as I'm sure it is elsewhere. Some people say, "If you can't stay clean in the joint, what makes you think you can do it on the bricks?" Those people haven't been here. I got with a guy here to sponsor me, and he has many years clean. We worked steps hard... until Step Six. What to do with my character defects? I

started doing some old behaviors, the same ones that tore me away from a life that I loved when I was clean. That was when I stopped being honest, so here I am once again with thirty-five days clean.

I've let a lot of people down over the last ten years, but I'm going to do this again, one day at a time. I'm going to start working steps again; I'm going to close the doors. What I have more than anything is a goal to make it out of here. Sure, it won't be until early 2019, but I'm free now from the addiction. I'm going to treat myself better and not dwell on all I had... it's about where I'm going.

I guess my point in writing this letter to *Reaching Out* is to let people know that you always have to work your program and always be honest, at least with your sponsor. I look around and still wonder how I got here, but what really matters is where I'm going.

CU, Oregon

Dear *Reaching Out*,

As always, it is a pleasure to receive my *Reaching Out*, lean back, and slowly absorb all of the wonderful and inspiring words. Sometimes it is difficult for me to slow myself down and focus on the beauty of the program. I find the most rewarding thing is serenity and peace. As I near the age of one-half century, my gratitude increases with every day I stay clean.

I have a sponsor I can relate to. He and his wife have been clean for many twenty-four hours. I look forward to seeing them and other members of my home group. These thoughts keep me going with a positive outlook on life. Learning new things every time I read NA literature keeps my mind healthy and focused. I just read in the last issue of *Reaching Out* the letter a member wrote about twenty-seven spiritual principles of NA. I try to practice as many of them as I can. I don't know if sharing NA literature with other recovering addicts is one; however, I suspect it is.

At every institution I've been in, I've attended the weekly twelve-step programs. Many of these meetings tend to follow the other fellowship instead of NA. Therefore I wrote to H&I in my area requesting a Basic Text. I noticed in the chaplain's office a row and a half of Fifth Edition Basic Texts before I left. The only thing I lack is a *Just for Today*. I find daily meditation essential to a good program of recovery.

It took every last drug and drink to get me here. I've heard a member share that after his twenty years clean it got weird. I don't know if I'll get twenty, but I do know I have today and a good shot at tomorrow if I don't pick up and if I work the program to the best of my ability.

JMM, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm a recovering addict of many years. I've felt as though I've been living in two worlds at the same time, real and not. The whole time I knew of a Higher Power. So many times I felt I was in three worlds. Life got real crazy. I came to feel as though I had lost my life; in a way I guess I had.

We all have "war stories," but I have a positive, grateful, thankful letter to write. My Higher Power has saved me time and time again. Today I know why, so I can pass on what I've been given. My worst day clean could never be as bad as my best day in active addiction. From five to forty-five I've been an addict, to hell and back, in and out of jail, prison, rehab on and off, relapse after relapse. At the same time, I've been in and out of church and the rooms of NA. I'm presently in a correctional facility, and love how I feel today. I pray day and night for my desire for drugs and that lifestyle to be removed from me. I know my prayers are working; my Higher Power is awesome.

Since I've been praying, I've had four drug dreams and felt better than ever when I woke from them. Why? I didn't use. Amen. Back in the day, I had many drug dreams and used in all of them. What a difference in how I feel and live today. I attend NA meetings when they have them. They're not very consistent here, so I've also written NA and received reading material. The material is very helpful, and I am anxious and excited to get out of here and start doing my part, as well as living this new way of life I've been blessed with. Thank you for being a big part of my new life.

DM, Ohio

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is Ray and I'm currently in Narcotics Anonymous. I've been clean and drug-free for the past twenty-one years.

My story is complex, but I'll tell it anyway. I committed my life-term crime while I was under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. I'm doing a twenty-five-year-to-life sentence, and I've been in twenty years so far.

When I was five years old my father went to prison for a drug-related crime. All I knew was that he was an addict. The information afforded to me was that he turned his life around and went straight. My father was murdered, and at twelve years old I witnessed a shell in a casket.

My stepdad was/is an abusive alcoholic who beat me constantly. As I got older the psychological pain and hurt were masked by my use of drugs. I received the sins of my father! About fifteen years ago my brother and his girlfriend died as a direct result of drugs.

People ask me, "Why don't you use drugs anymore?" My answer is simple. I admit that I'm powerless over my addiction and that my life had become unmanageable. I surrendered to my Higher Power/God because I believed he could restore my sanity while I make a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself. Because NA has twelve steps, I'm careful to take it one day at a time. Sometimes I have to retrace the steps in order to keep myself sane and drug-free.

My story is simple: I don't do drugs because I love God, myself, and other human beings. I stay clean because I don't live in the past. One day and one step at a time, I can face whatever issues I need to deal with, with a clean mind.

For the recovering addict, I share a quote with you: "You can do it."

RC, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is T and I am an addict. I have been an addict for thirty years and I am sick and tired of being sick and tired. I am serving a sixteen-to-life sentence for committing crimes to fuel my drug use. I have been incarcerated for eight years now and I have been clean for all eight years. I know that when I am released, in order to remain on the straight and narrow I am going to need help from NA. I am no stranger to NA, because when I was released before, I attended

meetings just to satisfy my parole officer. I listened but didn't take anything to heart from those meetings.

I started using drugs when I was sixteen years old. I am now forty-six, have been to prison four times, and like I said, I am sick and tired. I have failed both as a husband and as a father. I have done major damage to my heart, which led to my having a heart attack and having to be shocked with a defibrillator three times, because of this disease of addiction. I have been working the steps and I am entirely ready to do what I must to stay away from drugs. I was never a religious person, but I can tell you that when I finally came to believe that I had a Higher Power who could restore me to some sense of sanity, well, let me tell you that the internal feeling I felt was similar to a burden being lifted off my shoulders. I know more than anything else what I must do to remain a clean and a productive member of society. I am not anywhere near being released. I have nine years left, and presently I am attending college where I will obtain my bachelor's degree in behavioral science. After that I have every intention of getting my substance abuse counselor's certificate.

I know that I will never be cured of this disease and have every intention of being in the rooms when I come home. I need it for my own recovery. At the same time, I want to help those who may be walking down the same path I walked. With that said, take care, be well, and remember, it works if you work it by taking it one day at a time.

Grateful and recovering addict...

TS, New York

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

My experience with NA did not begin behind the walls. I did experience NA when I was in rehab and a member of H&I brought in a meeting. I was so beaten down and miserable that I had a hard time believing what they were saying. They just looked too happy and relaxed to have used like I did. Even when they started sharing and telling stories about using like I did, it was still hard to feel less hopeless.

I must have felt some hope, because I started going to NA meetings when I left that rehab. I wanted to use very badly, but still kept going to meetings. The people in the meetings told me to keep coming; "It will get better," they said. I knew the desperate situation that I was in, so I kept going to meetings, and believe or not, it did get better. I first got involved in H&I when my sponsor started dragging me to meetings. I was instantly grateful because I remembered feeling the hopelessness I saw in the eyes of the inmates. My life was a hundred times better at that time, and I owed it all to NA.

One of my H&I commitments was at a jail every Thursday night. My most memorable experience was when an addict I used to see in meetings all the time showed up at a meeting with other inmates. He shared that night about receiving the gift of recovery and having a successful life. He lived that life, but stopped going to meetings. He ended up using and very quickly ended up back in prison.

He shared about how he had the gift of recovery, but took it for granted. His sharing taught me that I never had to feel that hopelessness again. I needed to make a choice to stay clean just for today. I also learned that this is a progressive disease, and using today will be far worse than it ever was.

NA has given me a gift, a gift that I can never take for granted. I owe that addict for teaching me that I never have to use today, no matter what.

CC, Nebraska

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is C and I'm an addict. I started using at twelve years old. I first got clean when I was seventeen. I attended NA meetings for a year and half. I then attended H&I and held many other service positions. Unfortunately, I lost hope and relapsed. A year later I sought help. I went to a treatment facility, and while there I attended three H&I panels and truly heard experience, strength, and hope to feel comfortable enough to come back to NA. They let me know that just because I relapsed didn't mean my chair was taken; I always will have a seat in NA. I have four and half months clean, and by the grace of my Higher Power and those who carry the message, I'm clean, alive, and able to work this program to the best my ability. I'm forever grateful for this program.

CB, Nebraska

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Over the years I've done many H&I panels in many jails and prisons. And every one of those has enriched my recovery in one way or another, but one stands out foremost in my memory. I did a level-four lockdown facility for a few years back in the mid-1990s. These were guys who weren't getting out for a long time. They would come together twice a month for their NA meeting and use that time to build relationships with one another. When the meeting was over and they went back to their pods, they would use every opportunity to maintain contact and that "one addict helping another" energy. NA would remind them of the value in this effort and how it strengthened their recovery. During the meetings they would help each other to read the literature. One inmate made sure that everyone could follow along with the readings. It was really cool to hear the pages turn in the room as everyone followed the readings. And over time, inmates who were reluctant to read would volunteer and in some small way strengthen their commitment to recovery.

It's been years since I've seen any of those guys, but I hope and trust that they have been able to maintain that commitment to helping each other stay connected to the program and to a new way of life. It's a powerful message that they carried to me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have had the experience. Thanks, NA; thanks, H&I; and thanks to those recovering addicts.

SR, 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*.
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