

Reaching Out



Volume 25, Number 4

October 2010

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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.

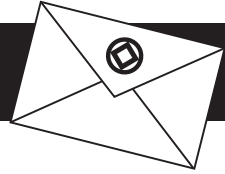
We encourage submissions for Reaching Out from members and H&I subcommittees. Please consider that we are more likely to publish articles that focus on how NA has helped an individual to recover while incarcerated, rather than those that concentrate on the horrors of addiction. Thank you for helping 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.

We recently developed 3 simple worksheets, designed to help our readers contribute to *Reaching Out*. The tool for incarcerated addicts was published in the July issue, and this issue features a submission worksheet for H&I members on page 13. In January, we will feature a worksheet created for NA members on the outside, who would like to share their story. These three new *Reaching Out* tools are also available on our website
http://www.na.org/?ID=reaching_out-index.

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
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*,

My name is TMV and I'm 17 years old and have been locked up for eleven months. This is my third time in jail. I have a review in two days and I am scared! For eleven months I have been going to NA. The first couple of months, I thought it wasn't for me. As I continued to go to meetings, I found a good support group. The thing is, they don't have NA where I am from.

I have thought about a hundred ways to start up meetings, but I am afraid of not sticking with it. I've been going through a lot of mixed emotions since I got clean. I have racing thoughts, and every time I go to meetings it takes a lot off my shoulders. I just got back from one and it was very emotional.

I'm about ready to leave, and I wish I could take the NA members with me. They are supportive and I will miss them very much. I'm not sure if I'm ready to face my addiction on the outside, but with all the support I have now, I know I'm not doing this alone. I can contact these people when I need to. I would like to thank NA for telling me never to give up.

TMV,
Newfoundland, Canada

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am 30 years old and have been using since the age of 14. I always had this feeling that what I was doing was wrong from the very start. I never had any friends when I was little, and very few when I got a little older. I have had low self-esteem for as long as I can remember. I was tossed around from one family member to the next. My mom and dad were out getting loaded. I always wondered what was wrong with me, why nobody wanted to be my friend. My dad died in 2008 from this disease, and I always felt like he didn't want me. My mother was doing her thing, and when I was with her I never really felt that she wanted me around. All I wanted was to feel loved and accepted.

At 16 I was introduced to the drug that put my life on a downhill spiral. When I started getting loaded, I met people I could call friends. Funny thing is, when I was loaded it didn't matter if I had friends or not. I thought I was finally okay because I could talk to women, feel like one of the guys, and not feel the pain.

I have been in and out of jail since I was 15, due to my addiction. Last time I got out of prison I went to an AA meeting that night and got real involved, but after a while I realized I couldn't relate on a deeper level with an alcoholic. When I got locked up this time my friend brought me a Basic Text, and I can relate to everything! I find myself reading it all the time, and it helps me in my recovery since there are no meetings here at all.

From the chapter "What Can I Do?" I was relieved to discover that I can begin my program from right here. When I get out, I no longer want to be a homeless person wondering where my next meal is coming from. I hurt the ones who loved me, blew off my kids, and isolated myself from everybody. This last time, I never felt so hurt and alone and tried to stop, but I couldn't. I always went back.

When I read the NA literature, I can understand and relate to the words. It helps me stay in touch with who I am and what's really going on with me. It helps me to feel that I'm not alone, and it gives me hope for a better life. I can just imagine what the program can do for me on the outside. I'm not sure of my fate yet in my legal battles, but with God and the people in the rooms, I'm sure I will be okay and be ready for the outside when it's time.

A Fellow Addict,

KW, AR

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is DK and I am an addict. I am 18 years old, and I have known I was an addict since I was 13. I am currently locked up in a juvenile correctional facility and I will be discharged in 76 days. My drug use has had a profound impact on my life, and not in a good way. I first came to jail at age 13 and spent two years in and out of detention for drug-related crimes. My dad passed away in August 2007. I was 15, and I handled that the only way I knew how: by getting high. Three months later I ended up back on the inside.

Now, I have officially been clean for 192 days. I currently meet with a drug counselor once a week. A month and a half ago he asked

me if I would be willing to read through the NA book with him. I've read through a good chunk of the book already and I am working on Step Two. Because of my drug use, I realize I missed out on a good portion of my childhood. Altogether, I have spent more than 31 months locked up. I know if I use again once I leave here, I will end up in the adult system . . . or worse.

Thank you, NA, for giving me some hope for a better life for myself, a life free of drug abuse.

DK, ME

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is DG and I am an addict. I went to my first NA meeting back in 1985. I left thinking that I was not like those people. Yet, deep inside, I knew that I was not only the same; maybe I was worse. I spent the next several years in and out of jail and treatment. The last few years of my sentence I got busy going to NA and into treatment, fearing that I would get out and use and end up back in prison for life.

I was released in 2002 with a few years clean and a healthy dose of fear. I did great for a year, going to meetings all the time, working with my sponsor and others. It was when I started lying to myself, thinking I could do this on my own and that I didn't need anybody, that things started heading south.

Work became more important than meetings. I stopped calling my sponsor. Then I relapsed. Three months later I woke up in jail looking at my third strike. I wanted to die. I was emotionally, spiritually, and physically bankrupt! I couldn't believe I had come to this point. I went to trial and struck out. Now I'm serving a life sentence behind my actions while under the influence.

Back on the inside, I have gotten into trouble twice, still thinking I could get high and get away with it. Besides, I would tell myself, I am doing life, so what does it matter? I'm not hurting anyone! Because of that attitude, I was sent away from a facility close to my loving wife to a maximum-security facility at the other end of the state. There is no NA here.

I have one of the two NA books around. Not only do my actions affect me; they affect my wife also, not to mention my fellow recovering addicts who came to depend on me at my last facility. The bottom line is this: We have a disease that tells us we don't have a

disease, and it is out to kill us! We can't do it alone, and we must be honest, open, and willing at all costs!

That is how it works! I spent 40 years trying to make it work my way, only to end up in prison for life. How long will it take you? I heard in a meeting one time, "How do you know when you hit bottom?" The answer is, "When you quit digging!" It's time to put the shovel down. Today I know one thing: I can't, but we can!

DG, WA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is MO and I'm an addict. I'm writing to *Reaching Out* to check in because I've finally landed where I'll be serving out the rest of my bid. I am able to get to two meetings a week. It's funny, but those are the only two days of the week I look forward to. I am of service at one of the meetings and it feels good!

It's a trip now how my disease manifests. The other day I was in the shower, and I looked down and saw what I thought was dope wrapped in plastic. My heart immediately started beating fast, and I looked around to see if anyone was looking. Then I started talking to myself about whether to pick it up or leave it.

It didn't take long; the instinct kicked in. I picked it up, only to find that it was just an apple sticker rolled up! All that power I put into a stupid sticker that someone peeled off an apple! It's hard to believe what I put myself through. I learned that the disease is still alive in my head, and I need to keep coming back. I'm grateful to be clean and to be a member of NA.

MO, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JH and I am an addict. I am currently in jail and I'm trying to work the NA program. I'm going to meetings when they are available, but there are only a few. It is hard to try and work a program inside, because nobody in here really wants recovery. Some of those who do go to meetings just do it to pass time. I feel alone and would love to be here for another addict seeking recovery.

My story is not simple, but whose is? I spent most of my life behind these walls, hiding from myself and running from ghosts. It's been said to me, "Wherever you go, there you are." It's true. I am

35 years old; hiding from myself is no longer acceptable. I have a lovely wife and four children. I try extra-hard to rid myself of any ghosts, not for them, but for myself. I want to be a father. I know I can be. I am not new to NA. When I was only months away from three years clean, I relapsed.

Once again I've found myself in this place, only now I'm looking at a life sentence. My relapse story starts almost a year ago. I was in an accident and hurt my back pretty bad. The doctors put me on medication because of my pain. I told them I was an addict, but the pain was so severe, it kept me paralyzed. I tried to go without meds for about one day, but my doctor said he was scared of me having a heart attack because my blood pressure was too high.

After some serious thought, I gave in. I told myself I was honest enough to work my program and the Twelve Steps. I forgot that this disease is a power greater than me. I immediately noticed my addictive personality starting to take over. I would sit there for long periods, in pain, staring at my pills. My wife could see that I was in pain, and begged me to take my pills.

I knew what was happening to me. I kept thinking, "How do I tell my wife that the man she thought was perfect is nothing but an addict?" I didn't want to tell her that the pills were changing me into the person I was trying so hard not to be. I should have been honest. I should have called my sponsor. I was so embarrassed that I was on the pills after all that time clean.

Instead, I tried different things to fight the behaviors and still be pain-free. I talked to the doctors, who tried other kinds of medication, but nothing worked. I gave the pills to my mom to hide from me, but I found them. None of these attempts to control the disease worked; I was hooked again.

Now I am clean once again and trying to make amends. I am working my steps and trying to keep my head up. I haven't been this honest in years. Losing everything I love to addiction made me see how powerful this disease is. I have to stay vigilant. I have only two choices: stay in my addiction or dust myself off and try again. I've already given this disease too much of my life. I choose to live.

JH, CA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is KM and I am an addict. I've been in and out of the rooms for years, just never worked the program. I have been incarcerated from one state to another, running from my problems. Through NA, I found out that the problem is me.

I knew I would have to get involved in order to stay clean this time. I got arrested in 2007, and when I first got to this yard there was only one NA meeting a week. Today, thanks to my Higher Power, the NA members here, and one of our counselors, we have three meetings a week! I have found that carrying the message and being of service is how I help myself.

I've been clean now for 33 months. I have a sponsor, I work the steps, and I help the newcomers. Being an NA member is awesome. It's a new way of life, one that I cherish. To anyone who wants help, you can stay clean if you want to! Give yourself a break and apply yourself to this simple program. The only regret I have today is that I didn't take this program seriously the first time.

I still have over two and a half years of my sentence to build on my foundation here; I look forward every day. Thanks, *Reaching Out*, for your newsletters and your support. I need you and love you.

KM, AZ

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is MW, I'm an addict. I am 40 years old; my whole life has revolved around drugs. I always thought my problem was money or that I didn't have enough of whatever to make it through the day. During my life of crime, I discovered that drugs were not problem; it was me.

Eventually, the big payoff came. The system handed me down a life sentence, without parole. I decided at that point it was time to change my life. I started going to NA meetings and working the steps, and I built a relationship with a Higher Power. My life has completely changed since I became honest with myself and others.

Through this program, my Higher Power, and the system, I have been given a second chance at life. I know that this program works, but you have to do the work. I am grateful for what I have been given by this program. So do yourself a favor and give yourself a break. There is a better way, and that's the NA way.

MW, WA

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am currently serving twelve months. When my lawyer tried for house arrest and the judge refused, I was flabbergasted! I thought my sentence was totally unfair. Through NA and my Fourth Step, I have begun to really look at my part in everything.

I used to laugh at the women who thanked God for being in jail. I learned, through NA, that I was lucky that I only got sentenced to twelve months. If I got caught for everything I did, I would be here for life.

While I am not happy to be here, I am using this time to work on myself. Prison has given me food, clothing, shelter, laundry service, a work ethic, and job and school opportunities, to name just a few. I now realize that the world does not revolve around me. I do thank God for a better perspective on my situation. I choose to live an NA way of life. Thank you for carrying the message of recovery and hope to people like me.

JL, LA

Editor's Note: Inmate step-writing committees (sometimes called Sponsorship Behind the Walls) are becoming more common in the NA Fellowship. If you are interested, contact your local H&I subcommittee or prison addiction services department to find out if this resource is available in your state/province!

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is D and I am an addict. Early in life I thought I needed something. I didn't know what it was, but it wasn't Mom and it wasn't Dad. I first found drugs at eleven years old, and after that I went to a lot of juvenile homes. As a teenager, I used more and more. I started shooting drugs at 16, and that lasted for ten years.

I attended my first NA meeting in a minimum-security prison. After being released, I hit the road. I thought being a nomad was the answer. I went to different cities where I'd wind up locked up either in psychiatric wards or county jails. I finally received some good, orderly direction (G.O.D.) in a mental hospital. I spent seven months there and found my NA family, thanks to H&I bringing in a panel.

I soon buckled down and read the Basic Text. I started working steps, and amazingly, I stayed clean after being released from the hospital! I went to a men's recovery house and learned some spiritual principles (mostly the hard way). Thanks to NA and my Higher Power, I am clean today. I am employable and I have a beautiful wife, all thanks to NA.

My NA family helps me through daily life in recovery, and I don't have to use anymore. I'm learning more about service and I can't wait to carry the message, not the mess. To anyone who reads this: Remember, just for today you don't have to get high anymore. This program is all about love and unity. I finally found what I needed. Today, my wife, my mom, my Higher Power, and I are all happy.

D, OH

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is M and I am an addict. I want to share an experience with you. I was recently asked to become a panel member for an H&I meeting in our local women's jail. I responded quickly with a resounding "YES" to the request. Then I thought to myself, "I should have gone to jail; I just never got caught."

Suddenly, I became overwhelmed with a fear that I wouldn't be able to relate to the women in jail, that I wouldn't be able to carry any kind of recovery message to them. When I said yes, I did so because

that is what I was taught. My sponsor taught me that when I am asked to be of service, I need to be of service. But, with this fear and sense of dread, I felt like I had made a huge mistake. I was ready to back down, walk away—no, run away!

I feared not being able to relate, but also that the jail would find out all the things I had done, and they wouldn't let me out! I know this is not how our legal system works, but that old irrational self-bashing talk had taken over.

Anyway, I spoke with my sponsor, shared in a meeting, and prayed. I was taken back to early in my recovery when I was whining about not getting anything from a meeting. I was reminded by an addict who has been around awhile that service is a vital part of recovery. He said, "Maybe someone needs you, and maybe, just maybe, you will stay clean because of your service."

So, for me, facing my fears and taking a meeting to the institution has helped me immensely. It has filled me with a new sense of gratitude and hope—hope that we are building a strong foundation for our brothers and sisters when they get out. And with that hope we all can find a new way to live.

M, NE

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict and my name is KB. I enjoy my life today. In recovery, I have had the privilege of going into a girls' group home and sharing my story with young teenage women. I opened my heart to them. I told them all about my life and my hopes. I was surprised when I found myself getting through to a young, troubled girl. When we first met her she never talked, and after our meeting she would run upstairs to her room before we could say good-bye.

One day I asked her to tell me one thing she liked about her life, and she told me "nothing!" I told her that I used to feel that way, too. I explained that I was there for one thing, and that was to help her to find a freedom from active addiction and a new way to live.

After weeks of visiting her and sharing my story, she came up to me before one of our weekly meetings and asked if she could tell the group how I helped her learn to like something about her life again. Wow, what an awesome feeling. Thanks to NA, I had that opportunity to carry the message and enjoy this new way to live.

KB, NE

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is W and I'm a recovering addict. I found NA thanks to an H&I panel in the county jail 15 years ago. When I walked into that first meeting, I was spiritually bankrupt. In my recovery, I believe it is important to carry the message to addicts on the inside through H&I because that's how I first heard about NA.

Meeting makers make it; all you need is two addicts sharing recovery, and it's on and poppin'. NA has changed my life because it gave me a new outlook on life. Today, I have a *Higher Power* that I found through the steps. I know that in order to keep what I have, I have to give it away. I try to practice the principles of the program in all of my affairs.

Being an NA member means I am part of the solution, not the problem. I'm able to make better choices. Thanks to NA, my family trusts me again and I trust myself. The best part of life in recovery is not having to run anymore. Thanks, NA.

WD, MI

H&I MEMBERS

You're invited to submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We are looking for the experience of NA members, like you, whose recovery has been enhanced by working with addicts who are seeking recovery behind the walls. Tell us about your H&I service experience, past and present.

Why did you get involved with H&I? _____

How has H&I impacted your recovery? _____

Do you have a particular H&I experience you would like to share?

What is one thing you would say to the addicts on the inside?

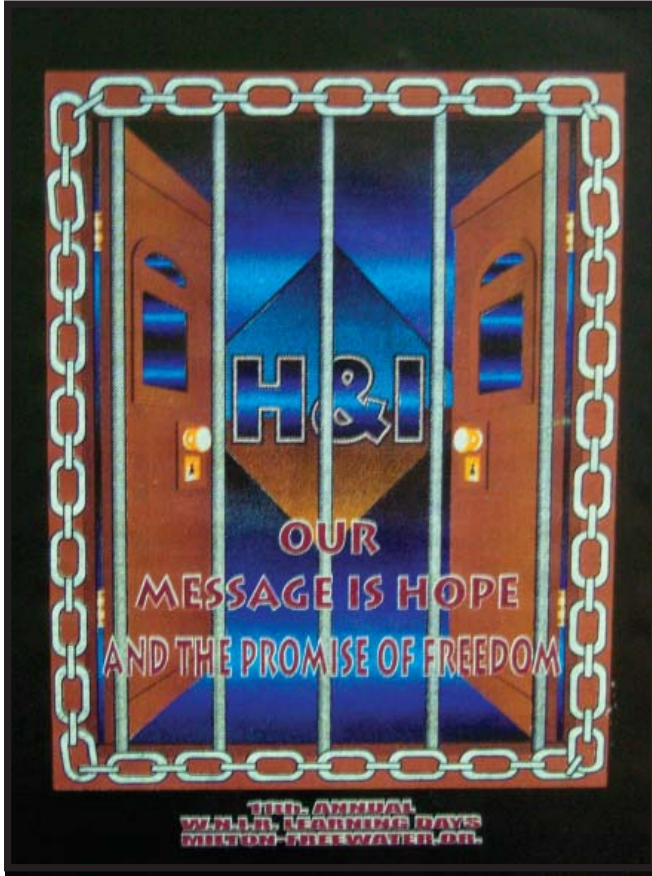
Thank you for sharing! Your experience with the NA program can inspire other addicts seeking fellowship and recovery.

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

To download a pdf of this worksheet, go to
http://www.na.org/?ID=reaching_out-index.

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 WNIR H&I Learning Days
Milton-Freewater, OR*

If you would like to see your art from the outside printed here, please send jpegs or pdf files to **HandI@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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