

History of Narcotics Anonymous in Colombia

Towards the latter part of the 70's and beginning of the 80's the first attempts were made to create groups of Anonymous Drug Addicts of Colombia. A letter sent to the WSO in 1979 asked for help to form a group in Medellin; unfortunately these efforts were interrupted and the group disappeared. It seems like they did not feel that alcohol was a drug and they focused the message of recovery in the other substances. People who attended these groups have told us that when the meetings ended every day the members would go to dance and to drink alcohol to have fun "free of drugs". For this reason and because the leader of this movement created a treatment center where he concentrated all his work efforts, this pioneering NA groups, quickly disappeared.

In the mid 80's, another addict who was recovering in AA and who felt that although the steps were the answer for his addiction problem he also felt that they were lacking identity, due to the fact that he was not allow to share about his real problem in these meetings and having become convinced about the need of having a space where addicts could support each other, he opened a group in the city of Medellin called "Drogadictos Anonimos". This group has remained open ever since and it was the foundation and the beginning of the service structure that we presently have.

At the end of 1983 the fellow member who had opened the first group, moved to a different city and the meeting began to go downhill until the beginning of 1984 when another member who had been clean for a few months in AA arrived to the group and kept it functioning on Thursdays and Saturdays with the hope of sharing the gift of recovery with others. The persistency of this member paid dividends and a few months later a few more fellow members arrived and they also stayed clean. Together this group of 4 people began to do service work to make true the dream that all addicts could have the same opportunity that they had found to free themselves from the obsession to use.

During this first period of the Colombian fellowship we did not know anything about the existence of NA and we simply used the AA literature and we did not have a service structure. From this first group another group was formed in the city, and it functioned at noon on Tuesdays and Fridays. We had 3 groups and four meetings weekly.

At the same time patients form the treatment center that the other member had created opened two groups also under the name of "Drogadictos Anonimos" but in these groups they combined the twelve steps with their confrontation therapy and therapeutic methods. Our first service work consisted in inviting these groups so together the four groups could create an Area Service Committee; they attended 2 service meetings but then they decided to continue working on their own and shortly after these two groups disappeared and their leaders opened a new treatment center.

From this time on we felt the need to have our own Program and Literature with which all addicts could identify; we also set objectives to have an office and to have legal status in the country.

The first piece of literature that we developed was a pamphlet with 12 questions, "Are you a drug addict? We utilized the AA pamphlet and we created questions that were related to our problem to our problem. One of the questions read, "For you the last dose is the next?"

We also made a card with the times of the meetings and a caption " We are living in the solution and we want to share it with you. The only requirement is to stop using." Every week we had a service meeting where we asked ourselves how we could grow, we began to write articles periodically, and they were published in our city's main newspaper. As A result, little by little more new members began to arrive and they also stayed clean.

In 1985 we made our first contact with the World Service Office, we wrote the office asking for help and we received a huge box with IP's and White Booklets in Spanish. We were very happy when we realized that we were not alone and that there was a program for us addicts and also we came to the realization that we had not invented NA. We gathered several of these pamphlets and with some stories from the White Booklet we published a pamphlet called "Introduction to the Program of Drug Addicts Anonymous"

After exchanging correspondence with the WSO and we talked about the problem with our different name " Drug Addicts Anonymous" and taking into consideration the "First Tradition" we decided to take in the name of "Narcotics Anonymous"

IN the mid 80's one of the four members who initiated the service structure traveled to the world convention in London and from there he returned to his hometown city in Panama City, motivated to translate the chapters that covered the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions from the basic text of Narcotics Anonymous. With this translation and the IP's we had received from the WSO and the stories from the little white Booklet, we created our first basic text in Spanish. This piece of literature that we created reinforced our identity and ended the dependence we had on AA literature.

By this time we already had 5 groups and 7 weekly meetings. We made contact with a foundation that worked with addicts in the city of Cali and with a group that was getting started in the city of Ibague. We continued doing periodical IP work posting articles in local newspapers and in service meetings we talked about ways of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers and also we studied the 12 concepts of service and the AA service manual. Between 1986 and 1988 we printed three editions of our basic book, two editions with 200 books ad the other with 1000 books.

In 1988 we organized our first event " The celebration of NA's Fifth Anniversary". This was a year where we experienced a lot of growth. The event attracted new members and we doubled the number of groups we had. We already had 10 groups with 16 weekly meetings.

At this time we did not have the concept of Home Group and most of us attended almost all the meetings. The Seventh Tradition from all the groups went into a common fund account. We only had a few permanent members and we had a lot of newcomers who would leave the program after a short time. Among the permanent members there was a great spirit of unity and motivation for service work and this gave us the strength to open our first National Service Office in 1989. A group of volunteers committed themselves to contribute money every month to pay the office's rent and we took turns every other day to answer the phone at the office. We initiated the first H&I panel in the city jail and we maintained regular communication with a group in Cali and with the WSO which continued to send us information, although we did not take advantage of much of this information because none of us understood English.

In 1989 a group of us attended the AA National Convention in Cartagena with the purpose to contact addicts who were seeking recovery in AA groups in other cities and to show our basic book. We sat on the sidewalk next to the entrance of the convention center and with an NA banner we invited people to come and find out about our program. That weekend we had a meeting for the first time with addicts from nine different cities in our country, we gave them literature and from that meeting several groups were formed in different cities.

The WSO sent us copies of the legal status documents that the Spanish region had used to give its region their legal status, and then we began the process to obtain legal status for Colombia.

We created a service structure similar to AA's conformed with a board of trustees conformed of addicts, non addicts and also some recognized health professionals in our city.

These were times of growth but it was also the beginning of a deep division between the two leaders that were left from the original four who started the service structure.

In 1990 we printed 3000 units of the basic book and we began to prepare our First Regional Service Conference to take place in March 1990. This service conference was another key point in our growth. The conference was named "United We Can Serve in a Better Way" and members from the cities of Cali, Popayan, Villavicencio, Pereira, Cartagena, Cucuta, and Medellin participated and also the director of the WSO who came accompanied by a member translator from the groups in Miami. The purpose of this conference was to present a service structure to the members of the groups in Colombia. This Structure was created based on the AA model. The director of the WSO illustrated us about the existing differences between AA and NA's structures. After a lot of debating and because we already had a proposal prepared, we adopted the structure we had proposed with a clause that made it clear that we would work towards having a structure like other NA regions around the world.

During this conference the Director of the WSO announced to us that they were already working on the Spanish translation of the NA basic text.

We also decided to have our first Colombian NA Regional Convention in the city of Cali on November 1990.

In 1990 we also made contact with groups in Ecuador and Peru and we sent them our basic text.

Our First Convention in Cali was attended by members from Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, United States and of course Colombia. It was a great spiritual party attended by about 250 members. In a service meeting during the convention, modifications to the conference approved service structure were brought up, combining it with the model presented in the NA Service Guide, but adopting the section in the guide that talked about world service and not regional service. This model was very complicated because at world level there were three bodies of service: Board of Trustees, Conference Administrative Board and the Board of Directors of the WSO. The members of World Services who were present in Cali, pointed out that we had the right to develop any service structure we wanted to choose from but that we should remember that whatever decision we made we would have to live with it and the more simple the better. However the collective conscience of our region moved ahead with this proposal and it was approved when it presented it during our Second Service Conference in March 1991.

During our Second Convention in Popayan we signed the minutes to be incorporated to our statutes, which were nearly approved. The members of World Services who were in attendance presented the final draft of the Spanish Basic Text and after the convention they traveled to our office in Medellin where they met with our region's trusted servants and they proposed to us the purchase of all the books we had left and then they would donate them to us so we could distribute them for free in PI and H&I work and that from that point on we would continue distributing the official Basic Text in Spanish published by the WSO. They also extended us an invitation for us to could send a delegate to the WSC in 1992 in Dallas, USA.

At this time the division that occurred in our leadership was growing more and more and the views about the way we should present our recovery program to the members were different. This matter affected every service topic. Some believed that we should not accept the proposal by World Services and that we should continue printing our own literature and others believed that we should adopt the proposal and that printing our own literature violated the First Tradition. Some believed that we should continue with the AA model of the service structure combining it with NA's structure and others believed that we should adopt NA's structure, which was already working in other NA regions around the world, including the creation of a Regional Service Committee and Area Service Committees.

Along with all this came the fact that we all had a lot of respect towards our first leader who sponsored most of the members and who combined his own spiritual belief with the Steps. On the other hand some of us considered that we should not combine our personal beliefs, but instead we should present the Steps the way they were written in the literature. This division continued to worsen and during the Third Conference the group collective conscience accepted to follow the guidelines of the FIPT where it was clearly stated that the WSO was the only entity authorized to print the literature. We also adopted the Regional Service Committee model as a service structure. Some members who did not agree, and who were led by this first leader, stepped away from service commitments and the majority stopped attending meetings.

We always resisted change, but as we communicated more and more with World Services, we began to acquire more of an identity as Narcotics Anonymous and we started to set a difference with AA meetings. We stopped closing our meetings with the Lord's Prayer and we began to form a circle using NA's prayers; we began to share from our chairs and we introduced ourselves as addicts and not as addicts and alcoholics; we stopped using terms such as abstinence and sobriety and instead we talked about clean time and recovery. This language that is used normally in our meetings today, caused a lot of debates and discussions among our members before it was adopted.

In the following years as other areas began to strengthen, a need arise for a more equitable participation in our Service Conference from different areas and decisions should not be adopted by a GSR majority vote from the city of Medellin where almost half of the groups in the country functioned.

Every year we have had the Service Conference in March and we have focused most of these conferences in proposing changes to the service structure. Today, the debate continues.

In the year 2000 our region hosted the 28th World Convention in Cartagena. This event gave birth to a new generation of conscious leaders that are part of worldwide fellowship and who continue to write NA history every time they meet to serve with the primary purpose of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers, not only in our country but anywhere in the world.

In the year 2000 one our female members became a member of the world Board and another member became a specialized worker at the WSO.

Our history is the result of service work from all members who have contributed their dedication unconditionally to make a vision possible that someday no addict will have to die without finding the recovery program that offers him or her: A new way of life".

The history does not end here. Everyday in every corner of our country and the world, an addict shares with another addict the NA way, and a new chapter is written in our history.