

Narcotics Anonymous in Aotearoa New Zealand: A brief history

The story of Narcotics Anonymous in Aotearoa New Zealand dates back to July 1969. An AA member James K B, Peter O and a group of friends who were sure that like alcoholics, addicts needed groups to recover, initiated the meeting. It was held at the Quaker Hall in Auckland's Mt Eden. The Quakers were the only folks prepared to let their premises. In fact the Quakers paid for rent power and everything.

Peter O, who attended and is still alive today, says he went along to a few meetings but they didn't really take off. The Traditions were never seen as a priority, especially the one relating to anonymity. No one really knew what to do and we would end up just talking about drugs. The venue was then lost due to all the media attention.

James also tried to carry the message at a local support house; he knew that addicts needed a tight social support. The people running the house tried to create an atmosphere based on *aroha*. This beautiful word, used by the Maori, New Zealand's indigenous people, means unconditional love, respect and compassion.

As far as we know, the people behind those early meetings never made contact with emerging NA communities in Australia or the United States. Nor was NA literature used. Apparently the meetings had folded by the end of 1969, with loss of the venue and James leaving Auckland. Police surveillance and the Alcohol and Drug Act were other contributing factors.

Thirteen more years would pass until the NA that we know today started holding regular meetings in Auckland. The first meeting went ahead on a Thursday night in September 1982 at the Christian Care Centre in Mt Eden. Janet C who had been introduced to NA in Australia was keen to have a fellowship here and so, with help from another AA member, the meetings began. They were held weekly and to give everyone a chance to share would often last for two hours! Sometimes there were only two clean members, with the rest of the attendees still using. "It was hard, but we were passionate about carrying the message and getting a fellowship going in New Zealand," says Janet.

Meetings spread around the country as people got clean, moved out of Auckland, and carried the message. One member, a professional researcher recalled the first amazing year. "Gradually, slowly word got out that if one wanted to get off the merry go round of drug abuse there was a place to go. Meetings remained small in the first few months. The main concerns were about the lack of money, procuring coffee cups, ashtrays and who was eligible to attend."

The fellowship really took off at the end of the year after Janet came back from a visit to the US and a conference in Tennessee. She got a lot of encouragement and information. "We no longer felt alone and it inspired us to hold regular committee meetings," she remembers. NA in Auckland became more solid and organised. When our vision widened a 24-hour phone and answering machine was acquired along with a PO Box and bank account.

The first NA newsletter, New View, was published in 1982. Members later noted the coincidence, that a poem by James K. B., incidentally a famous New Zealand poet, was published in the magazine. Recovery stories were few! At that time it was not known that he had started NA in '69. We were also holding meetings in the St James Centre in downtown Auckland.

The first Group Service Meeting, as they were called then, was held 11 December 1983. The biggest problem at that time was seen as the lack of literature and funds for photocopying. "Unaware we were breaking Traditions, we copied the literature with the help of an obliging member Xeroxing at her place of employment. We were loath to fundraise through fear of being diverted from our primary purpose though we really wanted to send a representative to the WS conference!"

Heated debates were held as to who belonged on NA. The Traditions always provided the guidance that was needed. With a growing awareness of the Traditions and Steps a second meeting was started – the Sunday Night Steps. Due to a majority of members being new to recovery the group decided to just go through the first Five Steps! Two months later another meeting in South Auckland began, called South Side. The newsletter, New View, reported slow but steady growth. During the first year the founding members kept close tabs on numbers and profile of who walked through the doors. These findings were reported after the first year.

The New View era provided a springboard for NA in NZ with members carrying the message around the rest of the country as they relocated or made contact. Within a year Napier was an active NA community. Despite the hundreds of miles that separated those first few groups, an incredible spirit of unity was emerging. In these days before email and fax, we relied heavily on the use of hand written communication by snail mail

Until the mid 1980s, addicts were too concerned about getting meetings up and running to worry about or understand the benefits of a service structure. It was seen as a priority to gain a sound understanding of the Steps and Traditions. A business meeting held by 3 Christchurch groups in 1985 records the 6 people present were thinking about ways to foster unity and carry the message by having more in depth discussion on the steps and traditions. A decision was made to purchase cloth Steps and Traditions banners from Australia.

Australia is a key player in this story. By the middle of 1985 the fellowship was growing across the Tasman and was in the process of forming the first Regional Service Committee. It invited the NZ fellowship to join. The committee was to be named the Australasian RSC.

Midway through 1985 Mario T, newly elected Regional Service Representative made the first vital contact with Dave G from Christchurch sending minutes of the first Australasian RSC and asking for a list of local meetings. He wrote: "As you may be aware, an ASRSC has been formed to serve the Australasian region. In order to register with WSO we need information on NZ fellowship."

Dave G contacted all know groups. Records show that there was one in Ashburton, five in Auckland, three in Christchurch, one in Hamner Springs, two in Napier, one in Palmerston North and one in Wellington.

Mario wrote back in October 1985, saying that the ARSC had decided to hold two full RSCs a year and would make funds available to fly a NZ ASR to Sydney once one was elected. He asked Dave G if the fellowship in NZ wanted to be one or two areas, one in each island.

This correspondence spurred the fellowship to think about creating a service structure. It was decided to start by forming one Area Service Committee and to request a representative from Australia at the first meeting to be held in Wellington. Held in the first two days of February 1986, it was known as the Greater Unity Convention. It featured sharing meetings on topics such as the Traditions, the responsibility of chairing, and the relationship of NA with AA. By July 24 groups in NZ were registered, contributions to the area, from groups, averaged 30cents !

Addicts flocked to Wellington from all over NZ. Don M from Auckland drove his motor home full of delegates from Auckland. Three vehicles came from Napier. At the wheel of one was Pedro. He recalls, " A feeling of fear and uncertainty was quickly replaced with love and hope as the gathering opened with an honest round of sharing. The familiar tone of the 12 Steps and Trads came through, strong."

The top priority on the agenda was the formation of the first NZ ASC. Those attending were Mario T. Australian Rep) and 11 representatives from groups. A range of office bearers was elected as we learnt about the positions. Janet C became the first ASR. Issues of the day included literature distribution and support for new groups.

After the area was formed it was decided to meet every 8 weeks, quite some undertaking for many members had to travel more than 1000 miles. Financial and geographical difficulties prevented more regular contact. By October 1986 there were 25 local meetings, a Hospital and Institutions meeting and a literature

review sub committee, and a policy sub committee. "We learned about the breach of traditions for photocopying preambles, and not using NA language, i.e. recovery as opposed to sobriety, identifying as an addict, not addict alcoholic."

After the first year of the formation of the ASC the number of local meetings doubled in size. Our first anniversary was celebrated at the Christchurch Community Centre in February 1987. There were now 28 meetings, and five H & I meetings. It was our 6th ASC and 27 recovering addicts were seated at the table, most of them GSR's.

The minutes record Janet C's joy and amazement at the progress of the fellowship in carrying the message since the formation of the ASC. In 1987, one of the biggest fundraisers was the Printing of our first Tee shirt, with the Logo, Keeping NZ Clean a spoof on a government campaign to stop people discarding trash.

To promote unity and get locals involved in service it was decided to move ASCs around the country. In 1987 they were held in Auckland, Napier and Levin. To help improve communication between ASCs combined group business meetings, known as Link meetings, were held. Service workshops were also held around the country, as Public Information became a big focus.

In 1987 negotiations took place between ASC and Central Office in Australia, later to be named Fellowship Service Office. This meant NZ was able to hold a stock of literature locally. By November 1987, a total of 43 meetings were registered.

At the Levin ASC, 70 addicts were present Discussion began about splitting to two areas- the North and South Islands. People were finding it increasingly difficult to travel long distances, having to often take time of work. ASC's lasted all weekend so accommodation etc had to be organised. Members used these gatherings as support, as many groups were small.

An ad hoc committee was formed to look into New Zealand eventually becoming a region. The decision was made at the time of the January 1988 Christchurch Rally to elect two ASR alternates at the January 88 ASC in preparation for this.

Some 150 addicts attended the Christchurch "Stepping to Freedom Rally". It was our biggest celebration yet and resulted in a \$1600 donation to the area. At the May 1988 ASC held in Rotorua, 60 members attended, but noticeable only 3 came up from the South Island. A decision was made to separate in to two areas by the end of that year, The ARSR was asked to attend the meeting to assist with this and guide the group conscience.

In January 1989 the Auckland fellowship hosted the area rally, Revealing and Healing. The ASC coinciding with the Rally was held on the Friday. There were

39 people seated at the table, 22 GSRs, 5 GSR alts, and admin committee members, plus two WS Trustees from Australia, Mario T and Garth P. There were now 60 plus regular meetings in New Zealand and with encouragement from Garth P and Mario T, the Conscience of the group decided we were ready to form our own region.

This ASC took the decision to separate into 3 areas and form a region. There was a lot of fear about spreading the knowledge so thinly but also excitement that we were coming of age. So January 15th saw the first NZ RSC later to be renamed Aotearoa – New Zealand RSC. Initially It was thought RSCs could be held every two months but costs to the individual and travel for more than 1000 miles soon prohibited this, so it was decided to meet quarterly. Meetings rotated around the main cities, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

Like most NA meetings in the 1980s the RSC was held in smoke filled rooms and copious amounts of coffee and herbal teas were drunk, The first two years had some teething problems, it seemed to take forever to get things done, and written communication was a continual problem. Matters of procedure seemed to dominate. The inaugural Chair tabled a set of twelve guidelines for the running of the committee. Finances were a continual source of concern, but having a representative seated at the World Service conference was seen as a vital way to lessen our sense of isolation.

Issues in the early 1990s included discussions re FSO 's reconfiguration and areas asking to have common needs meetings at regional conventions. Another big topic was how we could acknowledge the biculturalism in the fellowship and support our Maori members.

Our regional name was changed to reflect the awareness of bicultural nature of our country, becoming the Aotearoa, NZ region, In 1991 on recommendation from ad hoc committee, our letterhead had a Maori design border incorporated. It was a Ruakawa design based on the leaf of the Tawa tree (a medicinal healing tree), and belonging to no specific tribe, having no tapu attached, but was of traditional kowhaiwhai design.

With NZ creating it's own region NZ was able to set up a branch office of Fellowship Services with a NZ Director part of the Australasian Board. NZ literature committees were a initially mistrusting of this service and fearful of letting go of their role in literature distribution after years of problems with literature supplies.

It seems overseas experience would arrive and offer their wisdom just when we most needed it. In September 1989, Bob Stone visited from WSO to discuss literature distribution Two years later Kim J spoke eloquently about sexual and racial issues. We were also blessed with a visit from Anthony E and Donna

Marcus when in Auckland we were losing sight of primary purpose getting caught up in controversy over common needs meetings.

In 1991, The Regional convention, Seize the Day, hosted by Auckland showed a profit of \$3000.

Public Information continued to be active, the Northern Area reported doing 73 presentations in a matter of months.

H&I meetings were being held in many prisons and institutions and continue to this day.

The regional Spring Clean Convention was held in Palmerston North 1992 coinciding with the inaugural Asia Pacific Zonal Forum. This also allowed 9 overseas visitors to attend.

By 1992, three years after it's inception the ANZ RSC faced its first major crisis. Out of eleven service positions to be filled, only one was filled. Enthusiasm to see on regional level was low. In the end some positions were filled except PI and H&I positions remained unfilled for years, this is also indicative of the geographical problems in NZ,

Areas took up the responsibility in their own areas rather than on a national level. The region endeavoured to make itself more approachable.

By 1994 the region was unable to consider attending the world conference due to lack of funds. Attendance was also becoming controversial, as groups couldn't see the benefit.

1995 No Reservations Convention held in Auckland. The long weekend allowed us to host our second Asia Pacific Zonal Forum in NZ.

The Regional Committee decided to use an inventory process to gain consensus from the three areas on the role they wanted the RSC to play. The results were tabled early 1996 at the In 1998 RSC stood at crossroads with only 3 voting participants present. To address the mounting concerns RSC decided to host a vision day in Taupo, in April to workshop the future needs of the region. This coincided with World services restructuring where titles of committee members were changed.

The Taupo Vision day was well attended with a number of strengths and weaknesses identified. It was also decided to centralize the RSC for one year. There was a renewed commitment to serve on all levels. We had been reminded of our primary purpose.

Despite all the highs and lows of recent years, the committee was reaching a number of key milestones. The 0800 number was now a reality, meaning that anyone could contact NA in New Zealand, via the national phoneline service. A suite of online resources were available through the web site, including fliers, PI material, and service announcements.

By 1999 it was clear FSO overheads were too high, we had moved from an office to a storage unit to reduce costs but we couldn't sustain our contract with Australia. We negotiated our own agreement with WSO.

The same year we heard of a music festival to be held a South of Auckland, a supposed a mini Woodstock. PI northern felt it important to attend. We camped on site and hosted a booth over four days and held NA meetings twice a day, it was our biggest PI undertaking yet. Today we confidently hold booths at many out door festivals and events.

In November 2001, the RSC helped co-ordinate one of the World Wide Workshops being run by members of NA World Services and the World Board. Held at Victoria University in Wellington, the event was attended by about 150 members of the local fellowship. It was described as 'one of the most powerful and uplifting NA gatherings' ever held here.

In 2002, Auckland was the site of the 2020 Vision Convention, where the Aotearoa-New Zealand fellowship celebrated its 20th birthday. A highlight was the performance during the opening meeting of "Aotearoa Lovely Hearts Club Band" sung to the tune of the classic Beatles' song. A star turn was given by the 'one and only Janet C.' resplendent in 1960s fashions.

It's now 2003, there are four areas in the Aotearoa New Zealand Region, and approximately 100 meetings, the last weekend in June we haold our annual Gathering to review where we as a region are headed.

Only a handful of NZ members will be attending the Fiftieth World Convention due to distance and costs but for many of us we will feel part of the celebrations as we link up by phone to the World Unity Day, listen to members from around the world, do the clean time countdown and then listen to the speaker. There is many a tear shed down under.

With improved communications all round , and support from WSO we no longer feel alone.

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NOW WE ARE ONE

Good Heavens!

We are One Year Old!

The current fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous in New Zealand had its First Anniversary in Auckland recently, so ...

HAPPY BIRTHDAY all concerned

and MANY RETURNS of all the good things that N.A. brings, not only to members in New Zealand but all of you in other countries and, in fact, recovering addicts everywhere.

To any reader still using, we can only say **Try Joining Us** and until you feel you can try, we share our Birthday Greetings with you anyway.

To celebrate our First Birthday, one enterprising member of N.A. in Auckland has compile a potted history of the Fellowship "Down Under". So please read on ...

N.A.'s FIRST YEAR IN AUCKLAND

Our first NA meeting took place in rooms at the Christian Care Centre in View Road, Mount Eden, on a Thursday evening mid September 1982. It was from this locale that NA Auckland acquired its name - 'New View'. The original meetings were supported by AA members so that there were at least 4 or 5 of us to keep the doors open in those early days.

Gradually, slowly the word got out that if one wanted to get off the merry-go-round of drug abuse there was a place to go, but until December, meetings were small with few newcomers. In December, Janet, who was the instigator of NA Auckland, came back all fired up from an NA Conference in the States. While recognising that NA exists not because of a particular person, but because of a loving God, I think all members today will agree that without Janet's vision and energy, we may not have come so far - almost certainly not so fast. From December on, NA in Auckland became solid and organised.

Prior to December, the main areas of concern had been issues like whether or not there were enough ashtrays and coffee cups. From December our vision widened. Committee meetings began taking place regularly; a bank account was opened; we acquired a post office box; a 24 hour phone, now in operation, was muted then. The first Newsletter came out, and Conscience meetings became a regular way of relieving group tension.

The first Group Service Meeting was held on 11th December, and not surprisingly, money (the lack of it) was high on the agenda. The big problem was the need for literature and the lack of funds for expensive printing and copying. We all agreed that it was important that newcomers were able to take away brochures and leaflets; that doctors and social services should be advised of NA; and that we also needed copies of helpful literature, but the cost was daunting. Copying has been done to date by an obliging member who was responsible for xeroxing in her work and had been sneaking NA material through her firm's copier, but with our raised consciousness, this was no longer feasible. Money was also needed for a post office box, and for the phone. There was the ambition to send a representative to an overseas conference, but talk of specific fund raising activities - raffles, stalls, etc, left some with the uneasy feeling of contravening the spirit of the tradition which states "lest problems of money divert us from our primary purpose".

The lack of enough money to do all the things we want (need?) to do still haunts us, but we now have an answerphone, and today NA meetings have plenty of literature for the newcomer, members, and other interested parties.

One of the first Group Conscience meetings was concerned with who qualifies as a member. A couple of members felt they had addictive personalities and were

attending meetings in an effort to avoid going to the depths of drug abuse. Other members felt these 'dabblers' were trifling with the meetings which had life and death meaning for some. The issue was resolved by reference to our tradition which states the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. As it turned out, only those who genuinely want to stop using stick around. We found that anybody who does not have a real problem with drugs, and therefore a sincere desire to stop, does not want to hang around NA - it spoils the fun of using.

The second meeting established in May was a Step meeting, and attendance is a little lower at this meeting than at the general meeting on Thursday nights. Because most of us were so new to the programme, the Step meetings initially worked only on the first 5 Steps. It has been only over the past week or two that we have moved on to the rest of the programme. Both meetings now take place at the St. James Centre in Auckland city, and a stable and central venue will no doubt contribute to growth.

Because our meeting book records the first names of attendees, it is possible to analyse the ratio of man to women who attend NA meetings. It is interesting to note that the meetings are made up of about 60% males, indicating perhaps that females are more likely to hide their problem, or perhaps that males, culturally encouraged to be more adventurous and outgoing, are more vulnerable to extremes of any sort, including addiction. This latter hypothesis is certainly supported by road accident statistics.

Our youngest regularly attending member is in their early twenties, although people as young as 16 have attended meetings. Our oldest member is over 50. We are a microcosm of the general population - addiction is no respecter of colour, creed, age or occupation.

Perhaps the most interesting statistics of our group are the figures relating to newcomers. Since December, about 74 newcomers have walked through our doors. About 10% of those who were looking for help stayed to become regular members. Another 5% attend erratically. AA reports the same ratio of newcomers who stay to work the Programme. It must be assumed that at least some of the 85-90% who do not come back will use again, and some will die ... but, for the Grace of God ... The miraculous growth of those who stay remind us all of what we have.

We recently found out that our NA group was not the first in Auckland. James K. Baxter, poet, rebel and philanthropist, was apparently responsible for the first NA in Auckland some 15 years ago. J.K.B. is now dead, but life weaves some strange 'coincidental' (?) webs sometimes and before knowing of our connection with him, we printed a poem by James K. Baxter on the front page of our first newsletter. Those who like to dwell on life's 'coincidences' may like to make something of the fact that all our meetings are now held in the St. James Centre...

Besides setting up NA, Baxter's ultimate ambition was to see communal centres where people who want to get off drugs and stay off them can live for a while. "At Present", he said, "they come out of hospital - and that's it. There's nowhere to go, they haven't got a job. More problems, so they turn to drugs again. The junkie belongs to a very close social group. When he breaks with drugs he loses his friends, everything." Setting up a half-way house is one of the most pressing priorities of the Auckland Group.

- Pauline -

You cannot move without leaving footprints
that some may follow,
So walk the 12 Steps.
