
REACHING OUT

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WELCOME

We would like to welcome all of you to the WSC Hospitals & Institutions Newsletter. We hope that the contents of this newsletter will assist you in your recovery or H&I efforts in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

FROM THE INSIDE

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi. My name is T_____ and I'm an addict. I wanted to take the opportunity to let you know how much I appreciate the time and effort you put into helping me in my recovery.

You see, I was introduced to NA in prison, and knew nothing about it or recovery until I came here.

It was through outside sponsors that my interest was drawn. I knew I had a lot in common with the other inmates, but didn't realize I had anything in common with free people, until I met some outside sponsors who shared their experience, strength, and hope with me. I felt an instant kinship with them. They made me realize that there is a better way and that I wouldn't be alone by going that way.

You see, it's because of people like you that programs like NA are working in the prison system today. Without your support, I'm afraid they would die—and with them a lot of good people.

One of the things we, as inmates, have a hard time with is sponsorship. As a rule, it's hard to find someone in here with enough clean time to make a good sponsor. So, if any of you have the time to give away what you were freely given, it would be a tremendous help to those of us just starting to grow in our recovery.

I want to thank you and ask you to please keep on doing what you are doing for us. With your help, I know I can make it.

Anonymous

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Thank you so much for all the wonderful work you've done for addicts in institutions, jails, and hospitals across America.

My name is D_____ and I am a grateful recovering addict. I have been in prison for over eighteen years. At the sixteen-year point I was released back into the community to try to pick up the pieces of my shattered life. I had made all the right moves while in prison to get an early release. (I have a forty-five year sentence.) After a lifetime of using, I knew I had to not use drugs in order to stay out of prison. Those were my goals and I did well (for a while). Since I was on a drug aftercare program, I was required to take a drug test six times a month. During my ninth months of freedom I used and got busted. At this point in my life, I realized I had a drug problem and couldn't stop on my own.

My parole officer gave me the option of returning to prison or going into treatment. For obvious reasons, I chose treatment. What I found in treatment was a lot of love and understanding. More importantly, I found NA. After my release from treatment, I attended ninety in ninety. Mostly, I spent time meeting people and sharing my story. People were fascinated by my story because of all the time I had spent in prison.

I became so involved in my ego-filled story that I failed to listen long enough to others' suggestions to get a sponsor and work the steps. My NA book sat on a shelf gathering dust since the day I left treatment. Instead of working an NA program, I was working my own program. After all, I wasn't using, I had a lot of new friends who were

clean, and I was going to meetings almost every night.

My parole officer was pleased at my progress, and I was grateful to him for the chance he gave me and the push in the right direction.

One day, shortly after I got my six-month chip, I called a lady whom I had met in treatment and hadn't talked to since those days in treatment. She was in the middle of a divorce and sounded really down. I felt I could give her some help, so I started driving her to meetings and spending more and more time with her. As time went by, we became romantically involved and went to fewer meetings. By the time New Year's Eve rolled around, I had totally lost sight of my powerlessness over the disease of addiction. On New Year's Eve I relapsed. Six days later I was on the run from my PO. Forty-five days later I was in jail, on my way back to prison. As I sat in jail, I realized I had just spent sixteen years in prison. I had gone to prison because of money to support my drug habit. I also realized my freedom had lasted sixteen months.

While I was in jail, the friends I'd found in those meeting rooms of NA gave me their unconditional love and support. I had more visitors than anyone in the jail. I couldn't believe those people cared as much as they did. I'd never felt so moved, so blessed in my life. It was at that point that I realized just how sick I was. I also felt in my heart and soul that in order for me to live any kind of a normal, happy life, I needed to surrender. I needed to turn my life over to my Higher Power and I wanted what NA has to offer.

Today, as I write this letter, I have been involved in working an NA program on a daily basis. I work the steps and attend a step study group as well as other NA meetings. I read my Basic Text and the stories in the *NA Way* and *Reaching Out*. I live my life "just for today." Today, I have a program of recovery that works for me. I let go and let God guide me. There is hope.

I feel really good about myself today. I am healthy, happy, and serene. I am getting out in eight months and I'm looking forward to my life. With the help of NA and my Higher Power, I know I can make it. So can you!

Love and Respect,
D., Oregon

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Some time ago, I received a copy of the Basic Text, *Narcotics Anonymous* from the World Service Office. I read the first two chapters of the book and a miracle has happened in my life. This book mentioned everything I used to be and mentioned the things I used to do.

It was the first time I saw tears coming from my eyes. I finally saw the true story, or history, not only from the men and women who wrote this book, but from my own life.

It was hard for me to look back at my past and accept that addiction destroyed so much of my life. It was hard to tell myself that I made many mistakes—that I lied to myself and to those around me. In one week, two chapters of the Basic Text did what doctors couldn't do, and that was, and is, the beginning of a new life.

I am currently incarcerated, serving a thirty-year sentence. I know every word written in the priceless book is true. I write because I want to share the miracle that just happened in my life, and because I want to thank you, NA, for sending me this book. It's what I call the "Golden Book."

I am deeply thankful for being able to know the experience of many men and women who have gone through the same things I have gone through and will go through.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to send the Basic Text and for letting me share the miracle that's happened in my life. My prayers will always be with you.

Sincerely yours,
F., Wisconsin

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is L_____, and I am presently recovering in an institution. I suppose that was one of the promises the book of NA kept when it suggested that if I continued to use, I would end up in one of these places. The most remarkable thing about all of this, this place saved my life. Getting arrested was the one thing that kept me from dying and, today, I am grateful.

This is the first time I've written anything about myself and don't know exactly where it is going, so things that I would like to say probably have been heard a thousand times over. So, what I will do is try to keep it simple.

I am serving time for robbery with no chance of parole. Since I am a second offender, I have to serve one-half of my sentence of thirty years. How do I do it?—Just for Today.

Don't get me wrong, I have a lot of regrets. It didn't take thirty years of my life for me to learn my lesson. I wish I would have found NA sooner. Maybe I wouldn't be sitting here today. Being stubborn didn't help much either. I wasn't used to success. The list goes on and on.

Now, what is different? I want to change. I no longer find the enjoyment I once found in drugs. I want to do something other than use. In the little time I've been clean, miracles have happened faster than I can handle it.

As I begin to accept what God has put into my life, I learn not to question His judgements. After all, during my life of using, I felt like I was Him. Now that I am beaten, I realize that He is the only reason I am existing today. Again, I am grateful, which brings me to another point I would like to express at this time: if it had not been for my being in prison, I would not have been able to find myself as I have. In turn, I would not have been able to help others who seemed as lost as I was. In being here, and being a part of the first group of men to start an NA program, we've grown from approximately twenty in attendance to about fifty men per meeting. All because we weren't the ones who refused to share our feelings in order to get better. This, in itself, made the program more attractive and less fearful for those who had the same desire as we, as I. Again my gratitude speaks when I share what has been freely given to me.

Our sponsors have been faithfully showing up for approximately four years and there is no way I can say all that deserves to be said of them. We express our gratitude by staying clean, applying what we have learned, and sharing it with others so they may find what we have found.

In the meantime, even though my future seems dim, it is not as dim as it was. Through the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, I have found hope. With that hope, I have gained faith that one day I'll be free.

Just another recovering addict,
L., Louisiana

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is L_____ and I am an addict. I'm twenty-three years old and I'm serving seven years in prison. I've been incarcerated for three years of that sentence.

It's really been a trip for me because I hit bottom so quick. And it didn't take long for me to become that person, the addict I found when I started using. It was the other side of me that came out while I was under the influence. For some reason I didn't like myself. I hated myself and when I found that I could make that square person go away, I did it every chance I could.

Everything I did as a kid, I did high. During school, at home with my mom, everywhere I would go, I would try to kill both personalities.

I really hated myself and even though I've been with NA for three years, I'm still trying to find "love" for myself. It's crazy. Even before I found NA I knew I had a problem, but NA let me see it as more than just my personality. I have the disease of addiction and I can't cure it, but I can arrest it.

I wasn't going to write this story at first, but for those of you that have never been to prison or are on your way, bring NA with you.

As I sit in my house feeling "free", doing it just for today, I will soon be released from prison. I will keep coming back to give away what has freely been given to me, the NA way of living. It doesn't kill anyone to try NA, but another hit of dope probably will.

From an addict,
L., Nevada—God Bless!

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm in a correctional institution for women on a drug charge. Before being sent here, I was out there working what I thought was a good program. I went to daily meetings, had a sponsor, and was working my steps. I had six months clean.

I had always believed in God. Now with all this going for me, why did I slip? Because I was doing things my way. Our program says, "Turn it over to your Higher Power." Well, that's where I went wrong. Just believing in Him is not enough. You have to let Him take control of your life and leave your life in His hands.

One day I was sitting outside under the trees and a voice in the

back of my head said, "Go write." I've never been able to write anything, much less a poem and this piece, but this voice wouldn't go away.

Sitting with pen in hand and not having any idea what I was about to write, I hope this gets printed in the newsletter. I hope some other addict out there will read it and find hope and recovery.

Today, even behind these prison walls, I'm free. Not only from active addiction, but from my destructive self.

I've turned my will and my life over to the God of my understanding. Today I'm not in control of my life. He is.

I know when I'm released from here that if I keep my Higher Power in the driver's seat of my car, I'll be okay.

I'm looking forward to that day. He's given me another chance at life, and with Him, I'll make it this time.

I'm living "Just for Today" with God in control.

Thank you,
C., Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J_____ and I'm an addict. Two years ago, those were the hardest words for me to say. You see, aside from being an addict, I never knew how to admit it. Because of that, I've lost my freedom, family respect, and someone I love dearly.

I am incarcerated in an Alabama prison. Needless to say, I became incarcerated for a crime which stems from addiction and my unwillingness to talk about it. I have been incarcerated for twenty months and in that time I have been able to see myself in a different perspective.

I don't want to concentrate this letter on using, because we all qualify. This letter is written to inform others how Narcotics Anonymous has helped me live inside these fences. I was on the road of self-destruction for many years.

For me, the Serenity Prayer has been an inspiration. There are a lot of things I accept which I cannot change. I've been given the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

I cannot express my gratitude deeply enough to reflect my feelings for God and NA in my recovery. It is truly a miracle.

Today, I follow the Basic Text, *Narcotics Anonymous*, to the best of my ability and today, I am asking my Higher Power, whom I choose

to call God, for guidance and patience to make it one more day, just for today.

Today I have an unconditional love for my program and everything Narcotics Anonymous represents.

I share at meetings and find gratitude when I do. Most important is: today, I can love, and I can honestly say to myself I have not used today.

With each month that goes by, I feel more comfortable with my program and my progress. For me, the best thing about recovery is that I don't have to do everything by myself.

Finding the program of Narcotics Anonymous was like having a ton of bricks lifted from my chest. With each day that goes by, I feel better about my kinship with my family, with other people in my life, and with God.

I no longer travel this path alone. I travel with genuine friends and one very special protector.

At this point, I feel that my recovery is solid. But I'm also aware that I need to keep working my program in order to maintain my recovery because I'll never be recovered, only recovering.

Checking in with fellow addicts, attending meetings, praying, working a spiritual program are things I must continue to do in order to stay clean.

When I look at the past—in the light of the present, I am reminded of the pain of active addiction and the grace of recovery. Recovery is never easy, but it is always possible. It's never too late to recover.

Today is a new day and I don't look at it as if I've lost anything. I look at it as if I've started a new life. Sometimes, we must lose to gain. I hope I've lost one thing, the desire to use. I know I have friends whom I haven't met yet, but to know they are there gives me hope to go on.

The ones who read my story—I want you to know I matter in your recovery because you certainly matter in mine.

I want to suggest to everyone to be patient and gentle with yourself. Remember there are people who understand what we have been going through or may be going through. They care and give us support every step of the way. Thanks, Narcotics Anonymous, for giving me another chance at life.

Love and recovery,
J., Alabama

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is D_____, a recovering addict who is very grateful to have discovered Narcotics Anonymous.

I started going to NA meetings at the correctional institution where I am currently incarcerated.

This is my first major incarceration. I am doing five years for robbery and drugs. I am twenty-four years old and I have a good wife and two very sweet children who really care for me.

Since I started NA, I feel all the guilt and remorse for all of the things I've done during active addiction. Before coming to meetings, I always used to ask myself, "Why am I in prison?"

I felt I had really not done anything, but hearing people share at meetings made me really see all the wrong and harm I have done to others who really care about me.

Today I feel as if I can't live without NA. I was wrong for letting active addiction run my life. NA helps me to realize that being responsible is most useful and works best on a day-to-day basis. I realize the rest of my life is not as important as today. There is certainly something in the fellowship of recovering addicts that gives us strength.

I don't have any reason to doubt that I am an addict because it has led me to prison. I feel this is an important time for me to get acquainted with myself and NA. I have been clean almost two years. I feel good about myself. I'm happy today and I'm doing okay.

D., Maryland

FROM THE OUTSIDE

Editors Note: This section is dedicated to aiding H&I subcommittees to gain a worldwide perspective of H&I activity. It reflects input received from H&I subcommittees and may address specific issues of interest to members in their H&I efforts, as well as personal experiences obtained through carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. Therefore we are asking members and H&I subcommittees to submit input to this section to the H&I coordinator at the WSO, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I would like to talk about my experience in doing H&I service. I need to tell you that this has been the most rewarding part of staying clean. It makes me feel that I am giving back what was so freely given to me.

It all began a few years back when I started to take this thing we call recovery seriously. I attended meetings and got a sponsor, but I always felt there was something lacking. It wasn't until a few years later that I would be given the opportunity to do, what I consider, the most important part of service work.

Let me take you back on this H&I road of mine: It all began when I was fortunate enough to have the State of Pennsylvania place me in one of their wonderful "housing facilities." You know the kind I mean, up at a certain time, eat at a certain time, get counted at a certain time. You know this type of place. Well, in any event, I was a resident for a number of years.

About nine months prior, I had come back to the program. I was going to meetings on a daily basis, using a sponsor, and working the first three steps. Then the day came. I was arrested and taken to court for prior offenses.

At first I did not understand. What I believed was, because I was clean, the judge should see fit for me not to go away. But God had other plans for this kid. I went with very negative attitudes, one of which was that I was, once again, being victimized. I had to break through this attitude or I was going to use.

I chose to do things differently while inside. I continued with what I knew to be the better way to live, and lo and behold, I survived.

What a miracle!

After leaving, I knew I had to reach others inside and let them know they could stay clean. I got involved with the local H&I subcommittee and began my journey of carrying the message to those still suffering behind the walls. I attended H&I meetings regularly and assisted our committee in starting new ones.

When I go inside and watch the newcomer "get it," it's a feeling like no drug I had ever used. To hear someone make that commitment to ask about the steps, and to not use, and to ask how to get a sponsor, just makes me quiver and gives me goosebumps.

Today, after twelve and one-half years clean, I still do H&I service. Why? Because I don't want to use and I still believe I need to give back what was so freely given to me.

If you have never participated in H&I service, I would strongly suggest you plug into your local H&I subcommittee and begin to experience what could be a chance in a lifetime. Try it and see, there is always a need to share your experience, strength, and hope.

In God's Loving Service,
Anonymous

Dear *Reaching Out*,

At just under two years clean, I was invited to attend an annual banquet sponsored by one of the correctional facilities. I was one of the many members on that panel who were invited.

At the time, I had shared my experience, strength, and hope two different times and when I arrived, the inmates who had attended those meetings greeted me and remembered my story. Now I've been a few places but never where so many remember and were so grateful to see me again.

The fear I always got when sharing or attending an institutional meeting was great, because I had never been physically institutionalized myself.

The reason I felt the need to attend and share at this type of H&I meeting was my empathy for the inmates. During active addiction I had always felt as though I was in a prison of my own making. That is why I feel I relate to those who are actually incarcerated. The biggest fear I had was if the inmates could see my fear, what would they find in my story to relate to.

The evening of the banquet I was especially fearful because now I was going to relate to the inmates on a one-on-one basis and I could not hide the deep fear that was lurking inside me.

After being greeted I tried to spot other members from the outside so I could share my fear. That is what I do when I am afraid today, I share with someone who will understand.

Before I could get across the room, an inmate came up to me. I recognized him, but not from a meeting. He was a man I had dealt drugs with a few years earlier. He re-introduced himself and told me how he had found NA (this is how God works in my life). For some reason, with him being there, I felt more comfortable. Before he said anything else, I told him I was really scared just being in that institution. He said, "You and I ran in the same circles, you must not understand, we are just like you only we got caught." Yes! I had another moment of clarity and realized he couldn't have been more right or made more sense to me at the time. God had put me in the right place at the right time. I learned so much from that experience alone.

I feel now I have a better understanding of just what it is that attracts me to Hospitals & Institutions service in Narcotics Anonymous. People like my friend can relate to me just as I can relate to them when I keep an open mind and keep my hand out to help addicts seeking recovery.

I no longer live in the area where I attended that particular meeting, but have committed myself to another institutional meeting where I am now living. I am no longer afraid to share openly and honestly with the inmates in any facility about myself and our recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

Anonymous,
Central California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I have the privilege and honor of being a panel coordinator for a very special H&I meeting. It is in a head trauma unit. All those who come to the meeting are in various levels of coma.

When most of us think of coma, we think of someone who is unconscious, unresponsive, lying in a bed hooked up to machines. That is a level-one coma.

Most of the people who have been in a level-one coma will come

out of that initial state and move up. There are ten coma states. Level ten is considered the highest functioning. All those who attend the H&I meeting are in functioning levels.

Those in head trauma units have long stays, anywhere from eight months to ten years, some even longer. Some may never live outside an institutional setting. All those that attend the meeting have drug related injuries. Every time I chair, I face many things I never knew could happen when I was using. Even in recovery, I have been sheltered from these realities. I see all those things I never thought, for one second, could happen to me. When I'm at the meeting I see and hear first-hand what can happen if I use again. Most of the time I have gratitude and sadness at the same time.

At this H&I meeting, I have met those who have been in car accidents and other kinds of accidents. Those who, out of total desperation and feeling there is no other way to stop using, pulled the trigger on a gun! Those who were shot when a drug deal went bad. Those who were "beaten to death" for the little drugs or cash they had or by another addict in a drug-induced state. Then there are those like B_____.

He had been clean for almost a year when a major disappointment came into his life. Like many of us, he wasn't sure how to deal with the hurt and the disappointment. So, he did what he thought was the only option at the time. He used. This simple act that we have done hundreds, even thousands of times, changed his life.

B_____ overdosed. He was comatose and in level one. He cannot walk. He cannot see. He cannot feed himself. He is no longer the active young man he was. Does our Basic Text contain enough hope for him? His sponsor thought so. He totally believed a Higher Power could get through to him. So he would go and visit, and read to him from the text.

His sponsor started talking to other members about getting an H&I meeting into the facility. The doors of service closed many times. The very idea of doing an H&I meeting for those in coma! However, God is always in charge and usually gets what He wants. This time, God used the services of the additional needs subcommittee. God knew that additional needs was looking for some way to coordinate services.

So, in May '91, the first meeting was a success. Even with the various types and severity of head trauma, all those in attendance could

relate to the topic. They all participated in the meeting, except for B_____, who sat quietly to one side of the room. He never spoke. This is the way the meeting went on every other week. Each time he was brought to the meeting. Each time he sat in silence. At about the fourth meeting everything was exactly as before. We made a circle and started the closing prayer. There was this voice saying the words to the prayer. A voice we had not heard before. It was the voice of B_____. Tears still come to my eyes when I remember that night he spoke. It was the spark of hope he had needed. As with all those with a head trauma, it takes a long time to recover from the injury, and to learn how to gain back functions. The Higher Power his sponsor believes in does grant miracles.

After a year, this meeting is successful. As far as we know, it is the first H&I meeting of this type in NA. It remains a cooperative effort between H&I and additional needs.

The average length of stay in a head trauma unit is longer than the average jail term. There is never any time off for good behavior. It's very hard work. Most have to start all over again, learning the most basic aspects of life. Feeding, dressing, and using the toilet are obstacles that have to be overcome. Most are in wheelchairs or have to wear heavy cumbersome braces.

What happens when these members go home? How many meetings are wheelchair accessible? How do they get to the meetings? Even for H&I we have had to face obstacles. For instance, there are suggested IP's to take into H&I meetings, but only a few are in large print. Those who can read really need the large print materials. Most of these members are from outside our region. They come from all over the country. Do we just give them a phoneline number and pray it's the right number and the person on the other end of the phone will understand?

They are separated from family, friends, and loved ones. For some we are the only "light in the tunnel" they have. They voice their fears of living on the outside. Many of the issues are the same as those who have been in penitentiaries plus the added physical, mental, and emotional trauma that can be easily seen. Of course, they have the same obstacles every newcomer has, feeling different and asking for help.

Nationwide, thirty-three percent of those who have received a head trauma have been exposed to a Twelve Step program. That's one-third of those with head trauma today. However, they have, at least until now, a zero percent recovery rate from the disease of addiction. Can H&I meetings of this type make a difference? I hope so, because ten to fifteen percent will receive another head trauma and of course one-third will be drug related. These statistics are what make me believe that H&I meetings in head trauma units are so important. It is the basis of who we are, "so no addict need ever die from the horrors of addiction." Out of all my service experiences, this H&I meeting has been the most rewarding for me, personally. Every time I walk into this meeting, I get to stare into the faces of Gods' miracles at work. Can your area or region lend God a hand? Help make another miracle like B_____ or any of the others at this very special meeting.

With deep appreciation
and gratitude,
South Hills Area H&I and Tri-State
Regional Additional Needs

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

H&I Learning & Awareness Days Coming Up

October 23-25, 1992

Florida Region Hospitals and Institutions

Fifth Annual Awareness Weekend

"Breaking The Chains"

Riverside Inn Resort Homosassa, Florida

for Reservations call (800)442-2040

Information call: Douglas S. (813)895-3829 Bob B. (904)796-1505

Saturday November 14, 1992

Donnor Center-Donner Park

Columbus, Indiana

For information: call (812) 331-3974

Note: If your area or region is holding an H&I Learning or Awareness Day, and wish to have it listed in Reaching Out, please mail a flyer or notice to the H&I coordinator at the WSO.

**MY GRATITUDE SPEAKS
WHEN I CARE AND WHEN I SHARE
WITH OTHERS
THE NA WAY**
