
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*,

My name is T.C. and I happen to be an addict. Unlike many of the experiences that I have read about in *Reaching Out*, I am an addict who was previously exposed to Narcotics Anonymous on the outside.

In 1980, I was given a fifteen-year sentence for an armed robbery that I had committed and was tried as a habitual criminal. By the grace of God, I received a hung jury on the habitual criminal charges, and did six years on the fifteen-year sentence. I was paroled from prison in May of 1986. I left my hometown in Tennessee, traveled to Massachusetts, and got a job in construction. It seemed like life was going okay, but as a result of people, places, and things, I was soon back

to my favorite activity—using drugs. It wasn't long until I was selling drugs also. But through it all, I somehow managed to lead a fairly normal life for two years.

Shortly thereafter, I transferred to Michigan when I began to feel that I needed to relocate. In Michigan, I quit selling but picked up the pace on using. I had told myself in prison that never again could drugs control my life as they had done in the past. While trying to obtain parole I was hit by a hard choice—marry the woman that I was living with or return to Tennessee. Being hit so hard so fast, the decision was to return to Tennessee.

Shortly after arriving, a brother who knew of my problem introduced me to Narcotics Anonymous and the concept of staying clean and free from active addiction. In the past, I had tried doctors, psychiatrists, religion, relationships, and any other way to cope with my addiction but none of it had worked. Now here I was attending meetings, listening to people just like myself saying, "keep coming back." They told me to surrender to win, to accept life on life's terms, and to take life on a daily basis with a God of my understanding. Never in my years of addiction had I felt the freedom that I would feel through attending those meetings.

After a while, I took one of the suggestions of the program and asked someone to be my sponsor. This individual had a working knowledge of the Twelve Steps of NA, but I was uncomfortable with talking to him. Eventually I asked another member to be my sponsor and this man happens to be my sponsor to this date. Through him, I have been able to understand more about the nature of addiction and of the possibilities of staying clean.

So far this story has sounded like a pretty good fairy tale, but to let the reader know that NA works, I happen to be back in prison. I was using heavily after a relapse, and couldn't stop using, so God stopped me, yet allowed me to live. I am back on a shoplifting charge and at first felt very angry and depressed that a society would put me back in prison after I had done my two days in jail on the shoplifting charge. A parole violation for a misdemeanor! Society had done me in once again. Why should I even try to get clean? But something happened with the absence of drugs from my system. I began once again to think clearer. The use of the program on the street had at least allowed me to come back to reality. I began once again to realize

the insanity of making the same mistakes and looking for different results. I also realized that jail is one of the guarantees of my active addiction, if I live long enough to see it.

With the assistance of other recovering addicts we have been able to establish the first NA group at this facility. This doesn't guarantee that I'll never pick up again but it allows the addict such as I the freedom, just for today, to say "My name is _____ and today I'm clean." Once again my Higher Power has given me the gift of life and the blessing of freedom. Yes, freedom, although I'm in prison.

Sincerely,

T.C., Tennessee

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I had the chance to read your magazine. I'm in jail in New York, waiting to go to prison. On my way to an NA meeting, I met a man from NA. I told him that we had very little literature about NA. I'm an addict and drugs landed me where I am.

I have three children who I love and who I hurt so bad due to my addiction. Reading your magazine gave me something to look forward to. I found that people in this program care. Drugs were always a problem, but I was scared to go to an NA meeting. Now I can open up and there's a lot about me. I'm an addict and a lonely one also. I use my steps along with my Higher Power.

I would like to thank the man who shared his magazine and would also like to thank you. I got a lot of help and understanding, and would like to say I'm open for members of NA to share with me while I'm behind these walls and when I come home. Thanks for sharing.

Anonymous

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I have come to realize, while working the NA program, that it is very important to have others around you to share your experiences, strengths, and hopes. It is necessary to choose like-minded people to associate with on a daily basis. In prison, however, this can sometimes be difficult to do as the majority of people in any given area are not into healthy behavior patterns, much less positive thoughts in regard to recovering from their addiction, whatever it may be. So

it isn't really easy finding and developing an open, honest friendship with someone. We do have the company of other members when we attend our weekly meetings and it should be there that we share our experiences of each week.

It is very important to recognize the need to be strong, standing alone when we have no other choice. We do have God. So there is always hope. But we must be willing, always, to call out to Him. I believe, for so many in prison, this seems very hard to do. Developing a spiritual foundation daily, while living in the harsh surroundings of an almost nonspiritual atmosphere can be very trying for us. But not impossible. Once we begin to make the effort at assuming our own responsibility for our own personal recovery, then we start to understand what's best for us. And, in doing so, we learn how to make healthy choices during each day. So we arise and say, "I arise, o God, to do Thy will." This allows Him to work through us daily. And when the situation arises and anger seems to surface, for whatever reason, we say the Serenity Prayer because God assures us that this will be granted to us.

Whatever free time we have available should be spent reading, writing, and discussing with a friend daily. This is how we grow, by sharing. And, of course, it takes time and patience to achieve recovery. But it works, if you let it.

G.H.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am not good at writing letters, but by the grace of God, I found your book on the floor of a county prison. I kept it for three days before I even looked at it. I was very impressed by what was in it.

My name is A_____. My folks named me after someone because they said that I would do good in life, which was true, but in 1988 I was introduced to drugs. In six months time, I was broke, out of a home, family, two cars, and trust. I am still locked up on a three-year mandatory sentence, but by being locked up, I learned about NA through a substance abuse program, which was a big help to me because I did not even know that I was an addict until I admitted that I was.

An addict is one whose life is controlled by drugs. I learned a lot through the NA program. I am a fellow that has a big inventory to do and restitution to pay.

In those six months of my addiction, I now owe a lot of money, but I learned that I would have to live just for today. I learn in my recovery that it is a process and not an event, and that staying physical, mental, and spiritual I could do a lot for NA or the outreach program. I don't have any money and my family is slow about sending me anything because they feel I was to blame for everything, and I guess that is true. There is so much that I could tell and talk about to help the program. I can do all things to help the addict because I am an addict.

Thank you for your time,
A.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am writing this with the hopes that you may put it in your pamphlet, *Reaching Out*, to help others stay clean.

Hi. My name is C_____. I am a grateful recovering addict. I came to Florida in October of 1989. I was running from problems like many times before. I started using at the age of seventeen to help, I thought, get rid of the problems. It did not help. They got worse. Since then, I ran and kept on running. I never wanted to admit I had a problem. I became powerless over everything: people, places, and things.

When I came down here, I said, as always, this time will be different, in relationships and jobs. I was not down here for more than a week, and the using caught up with me.

I was picked up and incarcerated on ten felonies Christmas day for stupid, senseless, drug-related crimes. I spent fourteen months awaiting trial. During that time, I did attend my first NA meeting. The only reason I went was to get out of my one-man cell, and to get a real cup of coffee. I remember walking in there like it was just yesterday, and it was twenty-two months ago. I walked into a room full of men who openly admitted they had the same problem that I still did not want to admit I had. A lot of them came up to me all friendly-like, and said "Hi. My name is so and so. I am an addict. Welcome to NA." I went straight to the coffee pot, and found a seat as far in the back as I could. Halfway through the meeting, an outside guest

got up and said "Hi. My name is J_____, and I am an addict." He started to tell his story. A few minutes into this, it hit me. Something struck home. I thought, "Hey, this guy is talking about me. What's going on here?" That's when I first realized that I was not alone. There I was, in a room full of people like me. I haven't missed a meeting since.

In February of 1991, the courts gave me twenty-two years. When this happened, I went into my old stinking thinking again. Just thinking the worst. I had nowhere else to turn, so I went to my last meeting there in the county jail because I was leaving the next morning for prison.

Now, I can honestly say that I am an addict, that my life has been unmanageable, and that drugs controlled my life, not I. Now, with the help of my Higher Power whom I chose to call God, I have found the freedom I have always been looking for, even while I am incarcerated. NA has shown me the strength, hope, and love I have always sought.

I am grateful this has happened to me because I realize I hit my bottom. Now, I have the chance and time to work on myself. I am thankful to God and NA that now I have another chance at life. I truly believe that if I had not been arrested at that time, I would be dead.

I write this about myself today, hoping it may help other addicts. I have been clean now for many twenty-four hours. I will continue living just for today. I thank and love all of you.

God bless,
C., Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is C_____ and I'm an addict. I tried to stop using a few times but I never really surrendered to my disease until this year. I was clean for eight months last year and making meetings on a regular basis. What I didn't do was talk about how I felt.

I sat up in front and learned to listen. What I didn't do was call my sponsor and my network. Well, as a result of what I didn't do, I relapsed and the progression set in fast. I let pride and ego keep me from coming back for a while. I rationalized with myself by saying, "I'll be back on my birthday." My birthday passed then it was, "I'll be back for Thanksgiving." Thanksgiving passed. Then I said, "Well,

I'll get clean for Christmas," and it passed too.

I came back, on what should have been my anniversary with one day and beat myself up. I forgot all the slogans that kept me clean before. My ego wouldn't let me keep one day clean. I tried to fool myself by having the same clean date only a year later. It wouldn't work. For a month I prayed to my Higher Power to help me stop using because I couldn't on my own.

I was incarcerated March 15, for what I thought would be temporary. After a week, I sent for my book (NA) so I could do some reading, and maybe find where I went wrong. I found out a lot more from reading. I found the slogan, "more will be revealed." I eventually got sentenced to a year. I have to do eight months. I had a hard time accepting that I could not get work release, or early discharge because I had violated probation. I felt useless and stressed. I asked my HP to help me but didn't understand the answer.

After reading my book over and over, I got new insights. It was also during this time I met another recovering addict who slept in the bed next to me. He saw my book and exclaimed, "you're in NA!" I said yes, and from that point my life changed. There are no coincidences in NA. We started our own meetings just to express how we feel and to be strong for each other. It grew by people watching us and wanting to get involved. They saw us taking our recovery seriously.

In four days our group will be two months old. We meet now for ninety minutes each day with a step meeting on Mondays, book study on Tuesdays, literature on Wednesdays, topic on Thursdays, traditions on Fridays, beginners on Saturdays, and pitch on Sundays. We're learning to love ourselves and applying the Twelve Steps in our current situation. It's hard to do time without a release valve on our pressurized bodies. For me, my meetings are my escape. It reminds me that even though my body is locked up, my mind is free.

The WSO and the Greater New York Region have helped us to grow by sending needed literature and a text. I'm able to deal with myself more and more each day. I've even come to accept being in jail as a blessing from my Higher Power. They told me to remember my last run, the rate I was using, and the things I did to get my drugs. I don't believe I would or could have lasted much longer. NA and my Higher Power saved me.

When I get out of jail this year, I'll have eight months clean. The same amount of clean time I had when I relapsed last year. This year I'll be more knowledgeable about the disease of the attitudes and I'll have a stronger foundation, but I must adapt my life to the program instead of trying to adapt the program to my life. I must ride out the pink cloud without getting cocky about recovery. Lots of things I know I'll have to turn over and others I'll have to get really humble with. The bottom line is I want to live and I want to live clean. The pain is a step toward growth and I must use the steps instead of the elevator. The longest journey begins with the First Step. You cannot deny an addict his pain, but NA will make it softer and pain shared is pair lessened.

I must remember today I have a choice and that, no matter what, I don't have to use. I can't pick up any drug or substitute one for another. I was not responsible for my disease, but I am responsible for my recovery.

Yours in fellowship,
C.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is C_____ and I am an addict. I'm currently incarcerated in Louisiana for some charges that my active addiction has allowed to follow me into recovery. This will make my third trip to the big house for reasons all us addicts know too well, the getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more.

I don't care to go into my war stories with you. Instead, I want to share what my recovery has done for me as a person lately.

I was first introduced to NA at a treatment facility in 1984. Once my treatment was over, I thought I knew it all and had my problem kicked. As we all know, too many addicts forget what works and they relapse.

At the end of 1984, my relapse had me behind bars. I was paroled in late 1985 and was still in my old behavior and patterns. Needless to say, in February of 1986, I was behind bars again. There I sat for four years feeling lost, lonely, hopeless, and useless.

After four long years, I made a decision that I was through with drugs. They were my problem. I was paroled in May 1990 and moved out of the state of Texas to Louisiana. On sheer willpower, I abstained

from any drugs for three months. Then one day I relapsed. It only started with a drink, but it ended with my using other drugs.

After a night of shooting dope, my HP and I, for I know he was the one opening my denying eyes that night, called the hotline for help. All along, since I first was introduced to NA in 1984, I knew somehow it was my answer but I had to go through what I went through to be able to accept it. A fellow addict returned my call in minutes and, for the first time, I realized that I was powerless over my addiction and my life was totally unmanageable. He shared his experience, strength, and hope and he did not criticize me. I went to a public detox the next morning and started my journey on the road of recovery. I was told just because I decided to get clean that life was still full of ups and downs.

In October, after thirty days clean, I was made aware that the authorities were looking for me for something I had done to support my habit. I turned myself in and faced this problem as I am being taught today. Face life on life's terms. I was released on a summons to appear in court in late November. I kept going to meetings, sharing honestly, and got involved with H&I. I had gifts given to me, that are so precious that I hold them sacred. They are the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the family of NA and an understanding of my HP.

I was incarcerated for my past actions and violating my parole. I know this will pass as all problems will pass. I read my Basic Text and work my steps daily. I write recovering addicts and share where I am with me today. I'm currently working Step Three, and I honestly believe this is where I am supposed to be. I'm making an amends to society daily and will for a while but that's okay. I'm at least free from my self-prison that has haunted me from age thirteen. I'm clean, and I'm growing as a person, and I'm grateful. So if you're locked down somewhere and your story is similar to mine, brother, we can recover, and we do it just for today, the same way we do these prison sentences.

Your recovering brother,
C.A., Louisiana

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 the section to the H&I Coordinator at the WSO, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi! My name is M_____ and I'm an addict. I'd like to express my gratitude to NA, especially to the H&I subcommittees. It works.

In April 1988 I was arrested once again on drug charges. What led to this? At the age of fourteen I started drinking. By fourteen-and-a-half I was using different drugs. At fifteen I was dealing drugs. My disease had me convinced not long after that I had to go to jail once in a while, if I wanted to "enjoy the life I had chosen for myself." I accepted that and learned to deal with it.

After numerous arrests, convictions, and near deaths, the last of which happened to be the night before my final arrest, I figured out how to get my drugs into the jail four days after my arrest in 1988. So, here I was doing what I do best, using and selling drugs.

Three weeks later I realized just how insane I really was. I nearly died due to the use of drugs. I was being offered, by the courts, twenty-eight-years-to-life imprisonment for dealing in drugs, and here I was still doing the same thing. I knew I had to find another way to live. I never liked prison life.

I had the willingness to stop using and I had the chance to attend the H&I NA meeting. Without actually realizing it, NA was working in my life. I was staying clean. It took six months for me to get some open-mindedness toward the program. I finally heard and learned the Serenity Prayer. I was finally humbling myself and was now teachable. Today the Serenity Prayer is with me always, in any situation that arises in my life. It has given me patience and much, much more.

I was incarcerated for thirty-three months, clean thirty-two months and never felt as free. When I made parole I started to get some crazy

thoughts of making a few quick drug deals enabling myself to replace some of the things the police so freely took from me during my incarceration. This scared me, so I shared about it in one of my last meetings at the prison. The H&I guys said they would be there for me if I would just come to a meeting upon my release. That if the urge to deal was still that strong they would sit on me to keep me from dealing any drugs. That gave me a little hope.

I went to a meeting upon my release and today I am very involved in Narcotics Anonymous. They gave me my life back.

Expectations wore me out upon my release, thoughts that life is going to be soooo easy now that I'm clean. HA! Was I ever wrong. I had to finally get honest with myself. Life is never simple, but with the help of NA, life gets easier and definitely better.

I've been home now a little over thirteen months without even a parking ticket. It's a miracle. The miracle for me though is that I'm still alive and I'm still free. I truly like the person I'm becoming. I actually trust others now, something I never thought I'd be able to do again, and I am learning to love again, unconditionally, especially those who belong to the Fellowship of NA.

I've become quite involved with NA H&I service work, I felt I need to return some of what has been given to me so freely. I am now chairperson of one of our many jail meetings, yes, a year-long responsibility, scary, but what growth I'm getting from actually being a responsible person. I was even just recently elected chairperson for our literature committee.

All the working parts of NA make a whole and I'm proud to be a part of it. I have a new life today, not perfect in any way, but I'm happy with it. I can keep all of that by continuing to work the HOW of the program on a daily basis. Honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness.

Sure, I still have crazy thoughts, but I always remember this fact: I did not become addicted in one day, therefore, I will not recover in one day.

It works! Keep coming back.

Thanks,
M.R.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I've been reading the articles in *Reaching Out* for many years. I have gained through service work with addicts in institutions.

When I first got clean, I remember hearing other addicts share about the wonder of watching another addict behind the walls finally light up during an H&I presentation. One of the first things I did when my first birthday rolled around was to do the footwork to get my jail pass.

After about six months of showing up at the county jail, I took on the responsibility of panel leader. I brought the message of hope into that facility for over two years, once a week.

There were times when I wondered what I was doing, what kind of message I had to share with inmates, since I myself had never been locked up. Some days, I left the meeting with my co-panel leader and we both said, "We need a meeting."

But some evenings, I saw the miracle when an addict's eyes light up with that special awareness that, just maybe, there might be a different way. I'm forever grateful for those moments in my recovery. They're part of what keeps me coming back.

After taking a two-year break, I recently renewed my clearance. I'm ready to carry the message once again to those addicts who don't have access to regular meetings. And my gratitude is overwhelming.

Today, I know I have a message to carry, regardless of where I've been or what I've done. I've been able to share with other addicts that no matter how painful life becomes, using never makes it easier. At three months clean, I lost my sixteen-year-old daughter to addiction, and I was able to grieve and feel the pain without getting loaded. Only through the grace of my Higher Power and other wonderful lessons I learned through Narcotics Anonymous was this possible.

To all the inmates who read this: Thank you for being such a big part of my recovery. And to other addicts: Thanks for being there for me over the years. I believe in the therapeutic value of one addict helping another, and hope to continue this journey called recovery. What a trip!

L.J., Oregon

Dear *Reaching Out*,

A loud cry for H&I. We all know the slogans: Keep coming back. We tried to carry the message. What can I do? More will be revealed. My gratitude speaks. HOW. The only way to keep it is to give it away. Are these only words?

By sharing the experience of our recovery with newcomers, we help ourselves stay clean. We need only tell them what happens to us. By carrying this message to another addict, we are reminded of our own beginnings. Newer members are a constant source of hope, ever reminding us that the program works. We have found that the way to remain a productive, responsible member of society is to put our recovery first. NA can survive without us, but can the newcomers survive without NA.

Only having one addict's opinion, it is my belief that the Twelfth Step holds others and myself responsible for carrying this message. Somebody showed me a way out (the only promise in the Basic Text), and a path to a better life. The best helping hand is one that has been helped already.

Anonymous, Indiana

Dear *Reaching Out*,

In 1983, after twelve years of trying to get clean in ways that only death remained untried, one more time I found myself hopeless and helpless in an institution. This time it was not prison or jail and I had arrived at the suggestion of another addict. In more ways than one, I really did not want to be there; but possibly I could save my butt and face at the same time, which is the place I was finding myself more frequently at this stage of my addiction.

After those forty-seven days in that twenty-eight day program, I found that I finally had taken something with me from the many treatment failures I had experienced—I attended my first meeting of Narcotics Anonymous presented by an area H&I committee. I still remember the rage I felt when a member shared his insanity with us. I knew for certain he had read my jacket and was talking about me. (Little did I know that the day would come when I would be of service with H&I and be a member of a panel with this person). Although I would continue to use for the next fifteen months,

finding myself in detox five times during the last nine months, I never forgot the feeling after that initial exposure to Narcotics Anonymous. I knew that there was good in the room and that the people who were telling me that it was possible to live just for today without the use of drugs were telling the truth.

Today, I know that what I identified with, when that member shared, was the disease of addiction. It was from that message that I would come to a surrender and admit, on October 15, 1984, that I was an addict. Even though my family and doctors and clergy and case workers all said that I was a failure and that I could not be helped, I found that feeling of serendipity come over me (that's when the grace of God and opportunity arrive at the same time) because when confronted with the fact that I was a hopeless, helpless failure, I was able to say that what I knew could help me was the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. A member of an area H&I committee came to that hospital detox that night and gave me hope by bringing a piece of paper with a list of NA meetings and told me that there is where I would find addicts like myself and that, if I came to those meetings regularly, I had a chance at staying clean. From that day until now I have been able to stay clean and have been of service to hospitals and institutions in whatever capacity possible. I have a strong belief in our primary purpose and know that there is no greater joy for me than working with and talking with addicts. My love for Narcotics Anonymous continues to prosper and my love for hospitals and institutions grows with each commitment. It truly is a privilege to be clean and to be able to say a few things here about the gift of the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous and the miracle of recovery.

Anonymous

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: If you are a recovering addict who is housed in a correctional or treatment setting, let us hear how Narcotics Anonymous has helped you in your life. Many times the articles that we receive cannot be used because they concentrate on using and not on how NA has helped addicts to recover. If you are a member of an H&I committee, let others hear how you or your committee have carried the NA message of recovery. We would like to thank all of the members who have sent in articles and other written contributions to the newsletter. We all have a responsibility to the suffering addict, and to ourselves as recovering addicts, to do our best in carrying the Narcotics Anonymous message of recovery—to participate by sharing with others what we have been freely given.

GET INVOLVED AND HELP US CARRY OUT OUR FELLOWSHIP'S PRIMARY PURPOSE¹¹

H&I Learning & Awareness Days Coming Up

Saturday, January 30, 1993

New England Region's

2nd Annual H&I Awareness Day

"Feel The Freedom thru H&I"

St. Ann's Church, Brock Avenue, New Bedford, MA
for information contact

New England Regional Service Committee

PO Box 2265

Abington MA 02351

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.