
REACHING OUT

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 4

OCTOBER 1994

World Service Office, Inc., PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999

Welcome

We would like to welcome all of you to the WSC H&I 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 B___, and I am an addict. I received my first copy of *Reaching Out* recently, and I wanted to express my gratitude! Your newsletter is especially important to me because, for some unknown reason, we haven't had anyone bring us a meeting for the last six weeks. I miss the sharing and fellowship with other addicts tremendously.

I am presently incarcerated in New Jersey, twelve hundred miles from my home in Florida. My arrest culminated a two-year relapse after twenty-one months clean. I am truly grateful to God for rescuing me, because although I had tried many times, even placing myself in detox once, I could not clean up until I got locked up.

I am thirty-six years old, and my using spans twenty-three years. I have spent 2½ years of my life in various treatment centers and 2½ years in jails and prisons. I have tried medicine, religion, and

psychiatry, all of which failed to keep me from eventually using. During the twenty-one months I stayed clean prior to relapsing, I regularly attended NA meetings and had a sponsor. The problem wasn't NA or my sponsor; the problem was my refusal to follow suggestions and, most importantly, my refusal to work the Twelve Steps.

I may be hard-headed, stubborn, and slow to learn, but I have reached a new level of surrender today. Since being locked up four months ago, I have written a searching and fearless Fourth Step. For this addict, the program of NA is more than attending meetings, having a sponsor, or attending NA functions. It is the change we undergo; it is the relationship we develop with our Higher Power; it is helping other addicts and carrying the message; it is the spiritual awakening we attain through working and eventually living the Twelve Steps of recovery. *My way doesn't work; the NA way does.*

Please don't misunderstand me. Attending NA meetings, getting a sponsor, and fellowship with other addicts are all vitally important! But for this addict, the Twelve Steps are the foundation upon which God is building the new B___.

I hope someday to carry the message of NA into jails and prisons and to become active in service through H&I. I believe we can only keep what we have by giving it away. Which reminds me, there's a guy in my cell to whom I'm going to give my copy of *Reaching Out* right now!

Gratefully clean in New Jersey,
BS

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J___, and I am currently locked up in a county jail for charges that stemmed from my drug problem. I was first introduced to NA when I was fifteen years old; I am now nineteen. I have never been arrested before and have yet to be sentenced, but with the help of NA I have finally been able to admit to myself that I am an addict. I have been here for forty days as of today.

I constantly moved from place to place after turning sixteen, finally settling in the California High Sierra. I started stealing to get my drugs. I felt I had to have drugs to make it through the day because no one loved me. Well, I ended up getting caught and

admitting to the charges. I lost my whole family, and I found out my that my grandmother, who had raised me, was going to die in less than a month. I decided to make myself happy and get my life together as best as I could to show her and myself that I'm not a failure.

After being here in county jail a few days, I went to an NA meeting. The guy was real nice and didn't give me the brush off like I thought everyone else had. I've come to believe that NA can help me, but I need to *want* that help. I do want help, and I know that any time I need someone to talk to I always have a friend in NA, no matter where I am at.

Thank you, NA, but most of all
thank you HP, my God.
I love you all!!
Nineteen and free,
JW, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict with eight months left to serve on this ten- to fifteen-year sentence. I committed a drug-related crime. Sometimes I feel lonely, wishing I could shake this feeling away. At times I feel empty, distant from everyone. And sometimes I cry. I miss my friends and the fun things we did when I was straight. My disease caused a lot of people a great deal of pain. I lost a beautiful woman in my life and a beautiful daughter. I pushed away everyone who meant anything to me.

My addiction to drugs took so much away from me. Drugs robbed me blind. I didn't know how to care for people I loved. On 1 October 1994 I will have three years clean time, thanks to the program of Narcotics Anonymous.

I'll always be an addict, but today I'm clean. Narcotics Anonymous gave me a new way of life, with friends who feel like I feel and some who hurt like I hurt today; friends I can share with and cry with when I need to; addicts who understand and truly care about me. I'm not a bad person, but my disease made me do some bad things. One day at a time, I am getting better.

I'm sorry for everyone who got hurt, including myself. Maybe in time I'll be forgiven, but first I have to forgive myself. In eight

months I'll be returning to the outside. NA is waiting for me out there. I came in messed up and lost all my friends. I'm leaving cleaned up with a whole bunch of new friends. I have a foundation with friends in NA. We can make it; people care.

Thanks NA,
D, Massachusetts

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is W___ and I'm an addict. Thanks for sending me *Reaching Out*. I'm incarcerated on a drug charge, serving two years. I'm lucky, because it could have been twenty years, or I could be six feet under. Today I'm a recovering addict, one day at a time.

I picked up my first drug at fourteen years of age. By age sixteen I was lying in a hospital bed, having survived a serious car accident that happened while using. I'm convinced that God didn't want to take me off his earth yet. I nevertheless continued to use through high school, ruining a basketball scholarship. I wasn't motivated. I went into the service only to receive a general discharge because of drug use—I picked drugs over a military career. Well, it wasn't too long after that when I ended up in prison for armed robbery. Wouldn't you know it, I was using the night I committed that crime. I served about 2½ years and was sent home. Drugs were awaiting me. I got tired of working BS jobs that weren't paying a thing and started dealing drugs, eventually becoming my own best customer. I thought I could just sell drugs any time and any place I liked. By 1987 I was back in jail on a possession charge, for which I served eighteen months.

I had been in and out of NA prior to my arrest. While incarcerated I started attending meetings again, but I was still in a lot of denial. I served my time, got out, and was back to selling drugs within a week or two, but this time I wasn't using because I had to take random UAs. I was the big man again because I had dope, money, a nice ride, my own phone, and good clothes—all material. All so quickly, it all came to an end.

I was arrested again in 1992 for possession with intent, and the police took everything. Before sentencing I went into an in-patient treatment center. My first thought was trying to beat the time, you see. Going to jail was starting to become easy for me; staying out

was the hardest. Well, I started learning about my disease and myself. I started talking about my feelings and my pain.

NA is teaching me how to live again and have fun in life drug free. I'm back in jail on a violation, but I'm living clean and going to NA meetings. I have an outside sponsor. Most of all, I've taken the cotton out of my ears and put it in my mouth. I'm taking suggestions and listening to my sponsor, my girlfriend (who's also in the fellowship), and other recovering addicts. I pray to God, my Higher Power, and when I get those reservations I say the Serenity Prayer. I'm due to get out again in 1995, and I must not try to take my will back. Though I have all the help in the world through the fellowship, recovery is up to me. I'm tired of living as negatively as possible; I just want to live life on life's terms, and NA is showing me how. I'm convinced that it works if you work it.

Sincerely,
W

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Okay, I'll finally do this. I've been on this journey through the Virginia state correctional system for thirty-five months now. This may not be much compared to some, but it sure took the wind out of me. My name is W___, and I'm a grateful, recovering addict. I wanted to write sooner, but there was a big part of me that kept telling me to wait.

The most important message I'd like to share is one of love and hope. See, when I went to court to receive my final sentence, I had just celebrated one year clean the night before. The judge sentenced me to serve eighteen years, with many more put on hold. I remember sitting in the little cell after court, asking myself if NA had failed me. I mean, I had tried so hard to change my life after learning of the deadly grip my disease had on me. "But I can't give up now!" I said to myself. "Too many people in the program love and care for me, more than ever before in my whole life, and I can't let them down." After that, other addicts didn't forget about me. My sponsor and I have grown stronger in our relationship.

People, I can probably write on and on about how other recovering addicts have become a meaningful part of my life while I've been serving this time, addicts I have never known and whom I greatly

anticipate meeting upon my release. All these people are NA-inspired just to share a little love, and I get all of this just because I make a decision every day to stay clean. That's a deal I can't turn down.

I am now nearing the end of this journey, getting ready to participate in a work-release program. I may or may not have gotten this far without the continued support from those on the outside. I do know that God has given me the gift of recovery, and I believe that in order for me to be totally fulfilled, I must continue to share this love and hope. Yes, our environment "on the inside" is hostile, self-seeking, distrustful, and all too often a breeding ground for hatred. Our NA principles are held by only a minority, but I assure you that the effort it takes to stay clean and live an NA program is well worth it. I'll keep coming back—and thanks, NA.

Sincerely,
WD, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, My name is D____, and I'm a recovering addict presently incarcerated at a house of correction where I have been sentenced to eighteen months. I am in the pre-release part of the jail, which is a kind of treatment program. I've been incarcerated several times and have been in and out of the NA program but have never been able to totally surrender and find a new way to live. You may be wondering, well, what makes this time different? I'm not sure I have that answer; I only know I'm desperate and have hit bottom head first. This bit has been a reality slap for me, and I'm ready to surrender and accept help from others like myself.

It's been a very humbling experience for me to admit defeat and powerlessness. I have been clean now for about eleven months, and I like the way my life is going. I'm leaving this institution in July, and I plan to go to a halfway house. On the days when I just want to give up because the assignment is too tough, my Higher Power walks me through all of the madness. I have a rough assignment ahead of me, but at the end of this road I will find my life again. I am very grateful for my second chance at life, and I'm willing to go the distance to change my life for the positive.

Truly grateful,
D

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I have just received the January issue, and you know what? I now feel like I belong. I have been around the fellowship for a few years and I never heard my story. But you know what we say, "Keep coming back, you might hear something that will help you stick around." Well, I finally heard my story in *Reaching Out*, and it is almost *exactly* my story.

Like I said, I have been around NA a while. I put quite a few days together two or three times before, but I never really thought I belonged. I am one of the people who always let personalities get in the way of the principles of the fellowship. I always felt different for some reason, and now I know why. I have a hard time believing that what people tell me is true, and I have to find out for myself that the bottom always has a dungeon. This uniqueness I thought I had let me forget where I came from. Each and every time I forget what it was like out there, I end up back there. This time I finally found that dungeon in my bottom, and I'm grateful that my HP did not let me suffer much longer. If he would have, I wouldn't be writing this letter. I would be the last word of our literature, *Who is an Addict?*, because I've done jails and institutions—only death is still waiting for me if I go back out there.

Thanks to H&I and the WSO for making it possible for addicts to experience recovery behind the walls. We have H&I visitors every other week, and our meetings are getting bigger.

Thank you HP and H&I,
D, Oregon

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is P____. I am an addict. The sense of hopelessness in my addiction had become overwhelming. Every good intention on my part and any attempt by others to help me only became more ammunition for my arsenal of addiction. The downward spiral of my life toward jails, institutions, and eventually death continued through all attempts at intervention. Without help I was doomed to continue in my self-destruction.

Incarceration gave me a needed opportunity to abstain from drugs long enough to see that my problems went much deeper than addiction to chemicals. There was little comfort and no contentment

in my life, with or without drugs. I tried twelve-step programs but continued without hope when they failed to "fix" me. Even though I had been drug free for over a year, my former experience told me I'd return to using upon release, given the right conditions.

One day while looking through books left by former inmates, I found a used copy of the Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text. Though I'd been in and out of the program for nine years, I'd never read any of the text except those passages typically read at the beginning of meetings. I adopted the book as my own and set out to read it. That began the reversal in the decline of hope in my life. I now consider the picking up of that book to be one of the greatest choices I've ever made. Here is some of what has happened since:

1. My sense of uniqueness and aloneness has been altered. I have a sense of one-another-ness with those who wrote the book, as well as with other fellow NA members.
2. I'm working/living a plan of action to maintain my recovery; there is no quick fix.
3. The NA program gives me tools to combat the discontent and boredom that plagued me during earlier periods of forced abstinence from drugs; comfort and contentment are no longer out of reach.
4. Recovery is reflected in my attitudes and responses. Not using drugs is a first step. Learning to enjoy life drug free keeps the challenge current.

Today I'm neither isolated nor alone. Today I have fellowship with others, my Higher Power, my Basic Text (I read it daily), and even with myself (I like my own company). I'm grateful to NA for helping show me that "today" is okay!

As real as I know how,
PF, Tennessee

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is R____, and I am an addict. I went to my first NA meeting while I was in a treatment center. Now that I look back on that meeting, I know that my higher power was guiding me even then. It was an anniversary meeting with a guest speaker. As I said before, I came to the meetings from a treatment center, and we have a saying in treatment, "You fake it until you can make it." Believe

me, I was faking it all the way. I just wanted to get through treatment as fast as I could.

The speaker was a middle-aged guy, and he was saying all the things about being an addict, and then he said something that really got my attention. He said he had been in prison most of his life, and from that point on I started relating to him. You see, I have been in prison most of my adult life also.

I started getting high at the age of fifteen. I was in jail by the time I hit sixteen. I am thirty-eight years old now, and I've spent more than sixteen years in prison. It was just a way of life with me; I would get released from prison and start my drug use all over again. Sometimes I would last six months; other times I would be arrested within thirty days. So, as you can see, my addiction and prison went hand in hand.

Well, the speaker kept saying how the NA program had worked for him. He had finally started to understand himself as an addict, and Narcotics Anonymous had changed him and his way of life. Well, as you can guess, I saw myself in that guy, as all addicts see themselves in each other.

When I arrived back at the treatment center, I started to apply myself to the program, and I finally began to understand something about addicts and addiction. After I completed my treatment, my counselor gave me an NA Basic Text and said, "R____, the first ninety days you go to ninety meetings," which I did. I talked to a lot of other addicts at these meetings, and I couldn't believe how open and honest these people were to me. I found myself a sponsor, someone I could really open up to. We spent many hours talking about ourselves and NA. With his help I started working the steps and applying them in my daily life.

I couldn't believe the change that was coming over me; NA was starting to work. I began to open up in NA meetings and, to my amazement, other addicts were listening to me without judging me. They would hug me, we would cry together, and they really made me feel like I belonged. That was the first time I felt like that, other than being around my friends in prison.

For some reason, after three years of being clean and living the NA way, I quit going to the meetings, avoiding my sponsor and other friends in the program. I really felt I had my addiction beat.

I had a good job, and I fooled myself into believing I was normal. Well, it didn't take long for my old ways of thinking to surface. The very first time my wife and I had an argument, I started using again. Little did I know that I had been looking for an excuse to use all along.

As usual, my addiction sent me back to prison. I've been back in prison for three years now, and I want to say this: The NA program didn't stop working for me; I stopped working it. I have rededicated my life to Narcotics Anonymous. I am now the chairman of our NA group here. Once again I realize my Higher Power is guiding me and, with his help and the NA program, I have a grip on my addiction again. Believe me, I'll never fool myself into thinking I can do it without the help of NA and my Higher Power.

NA has given me the tools I need to live a clean and productive life. I thank God for them and for other recovering addicts.

RH, Alabama

FROM THE OUTSIDE

***Editor's note:** This section is dedicated to helping local H&I subcommittees develop a global perspective on 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. Members and H&I subcommittees should send their input to the WSO H&I Coordinator, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys CA 91409 USA.*

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict; my name is M____. I received my July 1993 *Reaching Out* today, and one of the letters from behind the walls literally brought tears to my eyes. It was the letter from the Chiracowa Apache who felt that he had not yet "found his tribe."

You see, it is because a recovering addict cared enough to carry the message of recovery into a state hospital during the summer of 1984 that I was able to meet and do service with the man who wrote that story. His name is _____, and he lives in my region. He is still clean and recovering in Narcotics Anonymous.

I didn't get clean that summer, but I knew where I would go when it got bad enough. More than two years later, on 10 October 1986, it got bad enough, and I began to go to NA meetings. That same addict who carried the message to me was still clean and active in the fellowship in my city. He had something I wanted, and he had planted that seed. I started following suggestions, except one vital one—I didn't have an NA sponsor. See, I thought that the one female who was steadily going to meetings was too young, and I didn't want to ask a guy, so I didn't ask anyone!

Small wonder that after 1½ years there came a day when an old using buddy came around with some dope, and I relapsed. That relapse is still vivid in my memory. It was as if I was looking down on myself, knowing, *knowing* that I was making probably the biggest mistake in my life, and absolutely, completely unable to stop using until the whole bag was gone. When it was empty, *that's* when

I dragged myself over to the phone and called an addict. That addict picked me up and drove me to a meeting. That addict also did something else for me that I could not do for myself—he threw my drug paraphernalia into the dumpster at a convenience store, at my request.

It was then that my recovery really began. I looked for, and found, a female NA sponsor. I followed her suggestions. I wrote the steps, and as we went over them together she taught me how to apply the principles of this program in every area of my life. I now have nearly 5½ years clean and I, too, have found my tribe.

It has been said that this is a God-given program. I feel that the people who practice the principles of Narcotics Anonymous are also God-given. Thank you, God, for that addict who carried an H&I meeting into my life. Thank you also for allowing me to stay clean long enough to meet the Indian who found his tribe. And please, God, help Anonymous in California know that when he picked up the Basic Text, he found his tribe, too.

Gratefully,
MF, Georgia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

In the beginning of my journey on the road of recovery, I heard over and over again about getting involved, hanging with the winners, and giving back that which had so freely been given to me. As I observed the winners in my group and others in my city, I saw people who had what I wanted. Most of them were involved with carrying the message of recovery to those who couldn't come to regular meetings, so I chose to join them in H&I service. It was a natural for me—I'd been to five treatment centers, arrested for forging prescriptions, and had gotten three DUIs by the time I found NA. I could sincerely empathize with those who were in jail or behind the walls of a hospital of some kind.

I started by going into a state psychiatric hospital with a detox unit. At one time the hospital had offered a twenty-eight day addiction treatment program, but a lack of funds had reduced their ability to provide services to addicts who couldn't afford private treatment. NA H&I became even more critical to those patients.

I began as a panel member, though we hadn't begun to call it that

yet. That meeting was always the best and most rewarding meeting of the week. I could feel the pain and despair those folks carried into the room with them, and I watched as they left carrying with them the hope that there was a way out after all.

Though turnover in the unit was rapid, our subcommittee was stable, active, and unified. I received so much love and support from my fellow committee members. I found that I could get real with those people about anything.

It was a turbulent time in my personal recovery, and God put those people in my life when I really needed them. They were always ready to help me up when I stumbled over real-life issues, and they loved me unconditionally. I learned how badly I needed them, and I was able to get humble and ask for their help.

Four years have passed. I continue to serve the fellowship through H&I. It's still the most rewarding aspect of my recovery—I get back so much more that I give. I'll always look back with fond, loving memories to earlier times when our area H&I subcommittee had covered-dish meetings to study the soon-to-be-approved *H&I Handbook*. I believe that recovering addicts are special people.

Anonymous

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I would like to take this time to share a few thoughts with you about H&I service and me. Hospitals and institutions service is rewarding for me because it allows me to work our Twelfth Step and carry our message of recovery to the addict who still suffers.

When I go behind the walls, I know from personal experience and official statistics that most inmates are doing time for drug-related crimes. The getting, using, and finding ways to get more combined with the total self-centeredness of addiction lead us to do many antisocial things.

The opportunity to carry the message of recovery is what H&I service is all about. The message might not always get heard. Some inmates are forced to attend meetings. Some are trying to impress the parole board. I still had an opportunity to carry our message of recovery. Maybe only one inmate will hear that message and seek recovery. Maybe not. In my own life I was not willing to surrender the first time I heard about NA. However, I did know where to find

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



H&I Learning & Awareness Days Coming Up

Oregon: February 25, 1995. Annual Pacific Cascade Regional H&I Learning Day. Campbell Senior Center, 155 High Street, Eugene. 9:30 AM registration. For info, write to:

Regional H&I Learning Day

c/o EASC
Box 262
Eugene, OR 97440



Note: *If your area or region is holding an H&I learning or awareness day and wishes 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**

