
REACHING OUT

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World Service Office, Inc., PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9099

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 J and I'm a newly recovering addict. I'm presently incarcerated in a California prison for a drug-related case. I'm now finally realizing that I am an addict and there is nothing to be ashamed of, as long as I maintain my clean time. I must give praise to NA for producing the literature of other addicts' experience, strength, and hope. This isn't the first time I've been involved with the NA program, but it's the first time I'm taking it seriously.

Over the last thirteen years I did pretty much whatever I could to get high. If it took hurting someone mentally, emotionally, or physically to get high, I did it. It didn't matter who I was hurting; as long as I got high, "oh well!" In all actuality I was hurting myself the most. I didn't realize that the reason I was getting

high was because I was missing something in my life.

With attending a meeting every Sunday and working to understand my addict personality, I've come to the conclusion that I've got to stay free of drugs to live. I can't fill a void in my life with drugs, but I can do it with the Twelve Steps. I'm just starting to work on Steps Two and Three in our weekly meeting and I really look forward to our meetings. I have mixed emotions about doing the Fourth Step due to the many skeletons in my closet. With the help of my father who has almost six years of clean time and my temporary sponsor, I should be able to overcome this feeling of fear. My father and his sponsor were once "hope-to-die dope fiends," and I know that if they did a Fourth Step, I can do it.

The NA program is helping me to recognize that the monster I once was can be tamed. I'm not a bad guy; it was just the disease of my addiction that made me a monster. The experience, strength, and hope of other recovering addicts have taught me to get humble with myself and ask my Higher Power for the strength and willpower to overcome my urges of going back to using drugs. I know that if I can't stay clean in prison, I can't do it on the streets.

Now I must end this with a big thank you to the people involved with the NA program, and most of all to my father, who I'm very proud of. I'm proud to be the son of a recovering addict. Thank you all and just remember, easy does it, and keep coming back, because it works if you work it.

Recovering and proud,
JP, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is M. It all began when I was a young kid. While growing up I was surrounded by drugs and violence. If you name it, I probably could relate. Growing up in such an environment, I basically thought this type of living was normal. I started venturing out on my own and picked up these bizarre traits which led me down a destructive path. I've been incarcerated a great deal of my life. However, I walked into treatment one day (not by choice, either) and something weird occurred. They were talking about me, yet I never knew I had a double. After that ironic session, something happened. I wanted to change my ways. In

1993 I managed to attend a Narcotics Anonymous World Convention in Chicago. It was one of the most incredible events in my life. I only had one day clean time, and we were having a clean time countdown. When they mentioned one day clean time, I held back all the tears I could and stood up. There was an enormous round of applause and countless hugs. I felt the love and fellowship all around me. Even though I relapsed and I am incarcerated because of it, it's okay today. I'll keep coming back! We have no NA meetings here, but I share the word because we have hope.

Thanks,
MM, Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi. I'm an addict called J. As I sit here, locked away from society, there are so many thoughts going through my mind. Having been an active addict for over forty years and in and out of NA for six years now, it is easy for me to accept the fact that I'm an addict and my life is unmanageable. When I first came to NA, it was hard to admit being an addict. Believing there is something out there that could restore me to sanity sounded like it might be possible. If you look around and see other people living and enjoying life, I mean, they must have found something! But turning my will and life over, that is something else. I must be the captain of my ship. So out we go to do a little more research (relapse). Again we come back with our tails between our legs. We go through the first couple of steps again; this time we are determined to do it right. We say, God, take my will and my life, guide me in my recovery, show me how to live. Again, you don't feel any different. You ask, did I do it right? You feel like a failure. You're doing the steps and life is still unmanageable. Time for some more research. I think you get the picture. You're in and out so many times you feel like a yo-yo.

If this sounds like you, I have something I'd like to share with you that I pray will help. The steps are a process and not an event. We as addicts have the rest of our lives to get them right. What do I mean by this? We don't just do the steps, we work the steps the rest of our lives. If it takes us that long to get them right, so be it. We as human beings are not perfect, and we will

constantly have to work the program. As we go through the adventure that is called recovery, we find ourselves faced with something called life on life's terms. We get crazy from time to time. But if we stop and look at it, we find that we are trying to control life. We are not working the First Step. We are powerless! Then we have to turn it over to our HP and all is well again for a time, until we take it back! Then we go back to Step One and start over. This is all right; just for today we don't have to be perfect. Perfection was something I tried to obtain all my life. When I couldn't, I used drugs to hide that fact. I am not God. Sometimes I used to think that I wanted to be, but not today. He is too busy.

For me the hardest lesson has been true and complete acceptance of the fact that I am powerless and that God could and would if asked. Just for today I ask, then get out of his way. I don't look for it to change overnight, but do what I can do: ask and wait. Today I know that he will answer my prayer but only when I can handle his answer without messing things up.

Love and respect,
JT, New Jersey

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is RD. I'm a grateful recovering addict with a few years of treatment and recovery under my belt. I'm writing from the belly of the beast, a place that I thought I would never return to. I was an addictions counselor before I caught my first bit, and I thought I knew how to fight this thing they call disease. I was a functional addict in denial. I received a 100-year sentence with eighteen-years mandatory. I thought life as I knew it was over. I was placed in an old prison where we were locked down eighteen and a half hours a day. We came out to eat, for recreation, and religious services. One day I heard them call for NA. I will never forget the feeling when I walked into the room. You see, NA never left me, I left NA. A brother told me that I had a lot to share but I was on the pity pot and I didn't want anyone to know that I was in pain. I just wanted to die. My family had abandoned me, my woman wrote me a "Dear John," and I had a very noncaring attitude. But the brother gave me a Basic Text, and after reading it, some things started to happen. I remember read-

ing, "Why me, why not me?" and I got off the pity pot and I started writing to everybody who was anybody. I turned it over to my HP and things started to change in my life. Before I knew what was happening, I was back in court giving all of the time back. God was working in my life.

I knew I had a mission to just tell people that if it could happen for me, then it could happen for them. Well, it worked. After serving almost ten years, I got out, got involved with the fellowship, started groups, and went back to prison as a counselor for drug offenders. But it wasn't over for me yet. I still never dealt with my issue of denial, and as a result I ended up acting out, being promiscuous, lying, cheating, and eventually I ended up violating my parole and was returned to prison.

I have been back in for two years now and I've been in treatment most of that time. And I'm an active member of NA. My struggle now is, I have a personal war that I declared on this disease and I am in a treatment community that doesn't even have the Basic Text. And nobody seems to understand that they, we, all suffer from a disease that's called addiction. Faith in a Higher Power and an education about what we suffer from is the only way to put an end to this revolving door. As a member of NA it is my duty to carry the message to the still sick and suffering addicts so that no addict need ever die without a chance to experience this new way of life. And even though you're fed up, keep your head up, because if life knocks you down, if you can look up, you can get up. Just hold on, it's greater later.

Your brother in fellowship,
RD, Delaware

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is H and I am an addict. I am presently incarcerated, again; now for the fourth time, for a total of fifteen years. I used and I lost and I lost and I used, same old music, just different words. During my previous incarceration I was blessed with the gift of desperation. I put my heart and soul into the program and Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. And a day at a time I put together five years and four months of clean time, and as a result of living the Twelve Steps I was able to develop a level of honesty, patience, tolerance, understanding, awareness, accep-

tance, serenity, and courage (to name just a few positive changes) that I otherwise never would have experienced.

Unfortunately for me, two months after I was released I relapsed and stayed in relapse for sixteen months. Today, thanks to NA, I believe I had to be placed back in prison to be granted the opportunity to reflect on what I must do differently upon my release. To make what could turn into a Fourth Step short and brief, upon my release from prison in 1994, after five years and two months of clean time, I felt secure. I never imagined picking up again. But I had to learn (the hard way again) that yesterday's clean time won't keep me clean today. Just for today is what is most important. I thank my HP for the Fellowship of NA.

HB, Massachusetts

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is H. I'm serving two to four years in prison. I was in recovery before, but I relapsed. Now I know the meaning of how powerful this disease is. I would like to share with you what NA, my sponsor, my support group, and my Higher Power have given me. They gave me a second chance. I have hope today, and a lot of love—something I was missing in my life. I had so much hate, resentment, and self-pity. I was born into an addicted family. I learned fear and pain at an early age. This disease has taken so much from me. I have seen my mother get murdered. I have seen my grandmother die because of drugs, and my one and only sister died from a drug overdose just before I came to prison. I have one son and I hardly know him because I chose to chase my disease. For that I am ashamed. I have been chasing this disease for twenty-nine years, and believe me, I have done it all, just to get high. Now that I'm clean, I have hepatitis B and C, and cirrhosis of the liver, and my pancreas is shot. I have been hospitalized four times due to street fights or drug overdose. So you see, I got a second chance. Today I am grateful for the halfway house that planted the seed of recovery in me. I have a great sponsor, who walks me through the steps. My support group helps me. My Higher Power is with me at all times. When I look back on my life, I know he was always with me. I hit my knees morning and night and thank him for what I have today. I make a gratitude list daily. I go to meetings in here and I love them.

I'm working on my GED, I have self-esteem. Sometimes I still experience compulsive behaviors, stress, and anger. I have an honest job today. It doesn't pay much, but what I make I am proud of. There are a lot of negative people in here. I choose to hang with the winners, people who want to die with this disease, not from it. So you see, I don't have time to waste on self-pity, resentments, and hate. I'm too busy working on my recovery. And living life. I love me today. I may not have my freedom, but if you're an addict, get off drugs, because that is the best freedom in the world. I know because I am *free!!!*

Free at last,
HH, Pennsylvania

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is M, and I'm an addict. I read the *Reaching Out* newsletter, and it was very good hearing all the things this program has done for people.

As for myself, it has helped me a great deal. I have been incarcerated for two years, and from the time I stepped into this prison I have been able to have some kind of understanding of NA. I have taken programs here that have helped me to understand the disease I have. I've tried doing a program before, but I just wasn't finished using (yet). I have been able to have a second chance at life today. My Higher Power, which I choose to call God, has made a way for me to work a program to the best of my ability. I'm involved with the program, and I'm chairing the NA meetings on Friday nights in my unit. I had to do a treatment program for a year (I was more than willing). I had a friend come up to see me, and that gave me lots of support. It has been wonderful. Doing a twelve step study has helped. Today I've been doing the footwork.

Coming to prison has helped me. I have found a fellowship that is so wonderful. I'm able to deal with parts of my past that I've kept a secret for so many years, and I'm not doing this alone.

I'm very grateful for the NA program. I hope everyone gives it a try. You have nothing to lose. Thank you for the *Reaching Out* newsletter.

MB, Idaho

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm a forty-year-old recovering addict who has spent all of my adult life in prison behind my drug addiction. I'm currently doing a twenty-three-year prison term, with a release date of May 2014.

I finally found these rooms back in 1991 through a loving brother who was twelve-stepping me at that time (of course, I didn't know it). I remember my first NA meeting that year, in California. There were people there who I had used with in the past, who I thought were either dead or back in prison.

The reason I need to write this letter is that I'm back on a relapse, and picking up the tab. It was the first time in recovery that I stayed clean, worked the steps with my sponsor, got to my meetings (even when I was locked up last time), got phone numbers, and used any other tool that was available.

It was the first time I started to live life, but in my last year I was headed for an emotional relapse until I finally picked up and used. To the brothers and sisters behind the walls who haven't lived life on the streets clean, I beg of you to go slow and easy when you get out. I didn't do a thorough Fourth Step regarding the pain I still carried. Being in prison, we have anger and rage within ourselves. We really don't realize it is still there. I've dealt with these issues with the same sponsor since I've been locked up.

I've taken the program more seriously because of the peace I have with myself and my Higher Power now. I haven't given up on the program because I want to live today, even in here, because my Higher Power walks with me every day in here.

I know one day I will get out, but I have to apply the program one day at a time in here by turning my will and life over to my Higher Power. I have faith and hope today because I know the program works.

I have seen miracles in here (even in my own life). I will do whatever it takes, and go to any lengths in my recovery to keep an attitude of gratitude on a daily basis. I know this program works because I have choices today.

So those of you who are getting out soon, give yourselves a break and trust those who have been working a program longer. Raise up your hand, and reach out when there is pain, anger, or rage surfacing within yourself.

Don't pick up, whatever you do, because a relapse is ten times worse than before, and the tab might be too heavy for you.

Hey, we are all addicts with a disease, and remember those bottoms you've hit to get here today.

Another recovering addict
from behind the walls,
SM, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J. I'm currently serving time in a correctional institution. But most of all, I'm a recovering addict.

When I arrived here, I was introduced to NA. After attending a couple of meetings, I knew deep down inside that NA was for real.

The people who gave leads about their addiction reminded me so much of myself, and that's when I became involved. I wanted to change my life around because I was tired of being tired.

NA has taught me how to live again without the use of drugs. NA gave me hope after despair. After sharing at a meeting, I felt so relieved, so happy, so determined to learn more about my addiction that caused me so much pain. And NA helped me to help myself. Just for today I'm clean, I have my life back, and through NA, even though I'm locked up, I'm free! May God bless you all.

Sincerely yours,
JG, Ohio

FROM THE OUTSIDE

Editor's 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. Members and H&I subcommittees should send their input to the WSO H&I Coordinator, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999, USA.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is BT, and I am a very grateful recovering addict who has never reached a high like the "high" I have reached through H&I. I am a fifty-year-old male who thought he had seen it all, done it all, and knew it all, who found my freedom by carrying the message to my fellow addicts on the inside.

I, like so many other addicts, spent more than my share of time (over twelve years total) as a guest of one institution or another, as a direct result of my addiction (while maintaining my hip, slick, and cool personality, and enjoying the "mental" mentality of my sickness).

I was presented with opportunities to make another choice in life by H&I panel members who took time to bring the H&I message inside to me at various times. Little did I realize the power of what they were sharing with me until I was directed by my sponsor to be of service through H&I, and took the action to do so.

Since I had my first H&I panel almost ten years ago, I have continued to receive a "high" like no other I have ever received before. Each time I have the privilege of going inside an institution and sharing with my fellow addicts what it was like for me then, and what happened along the way of recovery for me, I feel bumps and tingles all throughout my large body. These feelings of gratitude and freedom can only be explained as the direct result of having found a new way of life through NA and its principles, along with the guidance and love of a Higher Power that I hope all of you can share one day.

For an old convict who used to consider it really cool to be an addict, today I realize the ultimate "high." I have been given the honor of being my area's H&I chairperson. I have all the panels I could ever ask for (twenty-four in our area) to be of service to. If I need to find more, I can always turn to my fellow H&I members and get my fix by asking to share on one of their panels.

Thank you, NA, for showing me a new way of life. Thank you, H&I, for allowing me to live my life through grateful service for the past nine years, nine months of clean time. I am forever grateful.

BT, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict named D. I became involved with H&I at six months, and have chosen to serve the fellowship in H&I ever since. I came from one of those "low situation bottoms." I had nothing—no money, no real job, no emotions, no morals, and no reason to live. But from my first day in the rooms, others who had all those things, and more, reached out their arms and welcomed me.

One of those who first reached out to me, I had seen before. By that time, he had several years in recovery. He was a part of a family that had all those material things—money, property, businesses, etc. But as I found out (from him) in my first months of recovery, all those things do not add up to happiness. He with all the money in the world, and me with nothing, ended up in the same place. He told me how that life couldn't make him happy, and how working with other addicts had.

When I came six months clean, that addict reached out to me. He said he was a part of H&I, and he took a meeting into a detox. I knew a little about H&I, and my sponsor suggested I go with him to "give it back." I said yes. This detox was in a part of town I knew; it had many addicts like me. Addicts who had nothing. Many were homeless.

I was nervous, but I got there. There were ten to fifteen men and women sitting around in hospital robes and clothing. Many were unkempt and unshaven, some had other physical ailments. After a shaky start, my Higher Power kicked in and I gave it away. It felt good. I will always remember that meeting, and sharing with those addicts for the first time.

More strongly will I remember my friend telling them some of his experiences—how in the time he was in recovery he had seen many, many more leave than stay, and how simple the program was, but not easy. And the decision to stay or leave was up to them. "Which one will you be?" he said.

That night they asked many questions of my friend and myself, and I never saw any of them again. However, that night I decided "which one I would be," that I would stay clean.

It has been eleven years since I spoke at that detox. I have continued to serve in H&I ever since. H&I has helped save my life. H&I saw me for what I could be, not how I dressed, looked, or what I had. You allowed me a chance for growth, change, and gratitude. Thank you, H&I, for allowing me to be of service.

DJ, Pennsylvania

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is LK, and I have been an H&I member for about three-and-one-half years. Being a part of H&I has been a great inspiration for me in so many ways.

I have spoken on many H&I panels. I have had my panel for two-and-one-half years, and it is an all-women's panel. I wanted this panel because of the many issues I had as a woman, to learn more of the things, as a woman, I could be aware of—the feelings, emotions, insecurities, low self-worth and self-esteem, and the non-trust I have for other women.

As an H&I member I have learned a lot about myself, and I have become friends with a few NA women. This (H&I) subcommittee has carried me through my recovery, and I look forward to my panel each month: giving hope to people who think they are hopeless, sharing self-confidence and dreams that do come true. I am currently the secretary of my area H&I subcommittee, and so far, I'm loving it. Commit to H&I, it's a great inspiration.

LK, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

When I first went into a detox program, I had no clue as to how to stay clean. I just knew I wanted to stop using drugs.

Four months before I entered detox, I had just been discharged from the US Army for failure in a rehabilitation program. After twenty-two years of military service I was out on the streets with a serious problem. In three months I had blown the sum of \$9,000 and was homeless.

My second day in detox they had an H&I panel from Narcotics Anonymous come in. I heard this one person share about how every time they had tried to stop, it was for only a short period of time. They had always started back by first drinking, and in a short period of time they were back using their drug of choice.

That is where I believe I had a moment of clarity. I related to this because when I had tried to stop using before, my disease took over when I started back to drinking. I had no idea of how to stop. I was totally bankrupt in all areas of my life.

Six months after detox I was asked to share on an H&I panel. I enjoyed sharing my story. I felt if one person in that room could relate to my story, as I had to that person I had related to in the beginning, my day would be fulfilled.

When the next H&I subcommittee meeting in my area was held, I attended. I took a panel. I also took the coffee commitment for our subcommittee meeting.

In six months, I was a panel coordinator, literature person, and coffee person. When I had fourteen months I was elected vice-chairperson, and today I am chairperson of H&I in my area. I have twenty-seven months clean time as this is being written.

I have several other commitments, and I am of service in other areas of NA. But my heart is in H&I. If I had not heard that person speak when I was in detox, I do not believe I would be clean today. Thank God for NA H&I.

MT, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict named A. I've been involved with H&I service since I had five months clean. Since that time, I have been privileged to be a panel member, a panel leader, and most recently, panel coordinator for my area. The gifts I receive from my commitment to H&I are tremendous.

I have regular contact with addicts who still suffer; it is difficult to forget when I see where I came from on a regular basis. I have been given regular opportunities to give back some of what has been, and is, freely given to me. I know I must give it away in order to keep it. These gifts aren't just limited to my life in NA.

The ability to make and keep a commitment, the clarity that my message gets when I practice sharing regularly, the experience that allows me to hold a variety of trusted servant positions—all of these help me in other areas of my life.

I can be a responsible employee. I am less afraid of "stretching" myself by taking on a new responsibility. I have learned how to communicate more effectively with others, and with whom I need to do that.

I was a fairly successful manager in my career before I came into recovery. The skills I am currently learning as panel coordinator help me in areas in which I was weakest as a manager. I am not in charge now, and consequently I am somewhat less controlling, because I have learned the world won't stop rotating if everything is not done my way.

I am learning to function as part of a team, and to communicate with others on my team. I no longer have to carry the burden of knowing everything, nor do I have to do everything in order to feel it's done correctly. Others can do their share, and I have faith in the group conscience that guides us.

I am hoping to resume my career soon. I am truly grateful to Narcotics Anonymous, and Hospitals and Institutions, for helping me gain self-esteem and some skills and principles to take with me.

AF, North Carolina

"When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man's entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous."

(From Chapter Eight, "We Do Recover,"
of the *Narcotics Anonymous* Basic Text, page 84)



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

Reaching Out
SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available *free of charge to incarcerated addicts* through the Hospitals and Institutions Committee of the World Service Conference. It contains letters written by Narcotics Anonymous members who are in hospitals, institutions, or involved in H&I service. This newsletter is also available by subscription to NA members, correctional facilities, service committees, or anyone else who is interested. For the yearly price of \$29.50, the subscriber will receive 20 copies of the *Reaching Out* newsletter each quarter.

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