
REACHING OUT

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 3

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

Welcome

We would like to welcome all of you to the NA World Services 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*,

I am a 44 year-old male, incarcerated in California. I have read *Reaching Out*, and your newsletter really helps me stay clean. Believe me, staying clean while being incarcerated is a chore in itself.

I read the twelve step book daily and am currently working on my Fourth Step. I am really sincere about taking this program with me when I parole. You see, I have slept on the streets, homeless, with nothing but the clothes on my back and a couple of blankets to my name. I am really tired of living this way, and I thoroughly believe I have reached my bottom.

The sentencing judge told me that if he ever saw me in his court-room again I would be looking at a life sentence. I am done. With newsletters like yours and by the grace of God as I understand him, I will never have to be here again.

I so enjoy reading your newsletter in here because it is like a breath of fresh air. Anyway, keep NA alive for us in hospitals and institutions, for we need to hear from you dearly.

Yours truly,
MM, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is E and I'm a recovering addict. I'm incarcerated at this time and was court-ordered to attend the drug court program, which included counseling and drug testing on a regular basis. I felt helpless, with no way out. I believed the whole world was against me.

I was remanded back into custody because of a positive urinalysis. The court judge informed me that I was a candidate for the penitentiary if I continued to use.

While in jail I started attending NA meetings, and here is where I learned what I needed to do to stay away from using. NA has taught me how to live life on life's terms and to accept life without the use of drugs.

I have realized what I did wrong prior to my relapse and what I believe led me to my relapse. My friends were using, and I had not begun working the steps with a sponsor. Unfortunately, I was right where I had been prior to my first arrest.

In NA meetings I've learned what I have to do to abstain from using again. I had reservations and no program. My girlfriend was using, and it broke my heart to tell her I could not see her or be with her anymore. We both cried, and because she would not abstain from using, we parted and went our separate ways. That was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but I had learned that my recovery was my first priority.

I thank NA and the fellowship for teaching me to live again. NA has taught me how to stay away from drugs and drug addicts. Through NA I received the knowledge, strength, and courage to say no to all forms of mind and mood-altering chemicals.

I now pass on what I have learned from NA, especially to the people who still suffer from this disease that we have. I thank God and NA for my recovery and for giving my life back to me.

CH, Nevada

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J. I'm an addict incarcerated in a California prison, serving a 16-month sentence for a drug-related crime. I have no one to blame but myself. I've been to three different drug rehabs, and I am known as a chronic relapser.

I've had time for the fog to lift, and I realize the reason I was so unsuccessful in the past is that all I did was fellowship in NA. The program is working the steps with a sponsor and being involved, not just hanging out and fellowshipping.

What's different this time is that I am slowly and thoroughly working the steps. There was a time when I could not put ten minutes together. Now I do it one day at a time, or a minute, or a second. Prison and death are truly the end result of active addiction.

The end result of the steps is a spiritual awakening. My Twelfth Step always takes me to a high spiritual place, and in the past I've done this step and then relapsed. I let a lot of people down, but I mostly let myself down.

My shame of relapsing almost killed me. I realize my recovery community is there for me, and so is my spiritual community, and at times they are one and the same. I'm getting my wings back so that I can truly fly with the eagles. I keep coming back.

JG, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am a recovering addict serving time in Texas on some federal charges of a financial nature. I've been clean for multiple years and came to be incarcerated while clean.

I've done service at the group, area, and regional levels. Through Narcotics Anonymous I've received the gift of abstinence and the loss of a desire to use. I became successful in life and a productive member of society.

In our literature it says that we vary in degrees of sickness and rates of recovery. I had reservations in the area of finances. I acted out on that.

I'm now awaiting sentencing on federal charges. The message I'm seeing vividly now is that we have to apply these principles in *all* areas of our life, and not just pick and choose. It is my direct experience that not heeding that message allowed my disease enough free

rein to drag me once again to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, and death—without even using.

While awaiting my sentencing and then a transfer to a federal facility, I've been cut off from meetings. H&I can't come in here. I got a book and some informational pamphlets, and with those I have carried the message inside here as best I can. So far, a few guys have shown interest and we have meetings in here amongst ourselves.

It's back to basics for me. I'm doing what I can with what little I have, and I'm grateful for it. I'm doing inventory work in the area I've neglected. I look forward to meetings in the federal system and eventually back home in Nevada. Thank you, NA, for teaching me the tools of recovery, and for allowing me to find a Higher Power that I can understand, as well as for touching my heart so that I may be able to carry this message to others in here and wherever I go.

An addict in recovery,
ES, Nevada

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm a 34 year-old recovering addict who's been using since I was 13. I am currently incarcerated in the state of Washington, and I have been clean since 25 February 2004. That is the date I was arrested.

Even though I've been in prison, I am free, and it is such a great feeling. I have my mind, body, heart, and soul back, and I have the therapeutic community here, and of course NA, to thank for my recovery and my life.

I have been going to NA here as much as I can. I chair meetings and I look forward to doing so. If it wasn't for me being in prison and finding NA here, I wouldn't be the woman I am today, clean and loving myself every step of the way. So, once again, thank you, NA.

Sincerely,
LM, Washington

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict and my name is I. First, I need to thank God for sparing my life and giving me another chance to change my life and perhaps be able to help someone else along the way.

I have to talk about where I am in my recovery, and when I do this I take out a little more insurance against a relapse. Another plus is that I get to stay clean one more day.

I like to listen because I don't have all of the answers. I don't know anything about living life on life's terms. My thinking is so dangerous that I think, if you're lucky you may get a life sentence or just hope that you don't get killed. That's why, when I talk, I try to ask God to work through me so that I carry the message and not the mess.

Today is another successful day for me. I didn't wake up dope-sick, I didn't need anything to get me going, and that's because God did for me what I could not do for myself. I have no regrets, and that is something I'm working on. I'm trying to live each day so that when I wake up in the morning I have nothing to be sorry for, and that's change for me. I owe it all to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

I'm grateful to be around some guys who are trying to do the same thing that I'm trying to do. We help each other stay clean through sharing our experiences. There are guys like J, who has done some of the same things that I have, and when he shares, it reminds me of where I came from. I am, after all, a professional forgetter. I need to be pulled up from time to time, and guys like M keep it real, sharing the pain and not holding back. Instead of telling me what I want to hear, he tells me the truth, and that's what I need in order to stay clean.

I'm grateful to have these guys in my life, as well as a few others. They told me that as long as I stay prayerful and grateful, I won't use. That's the NA program working. Again, I stay clean through sharing, and maybe somebody will hear something that will lead them to the program or maybe even save their life. One day clean is a miracle for me, and for that I am grateful. Thanks, everyone, for listening, and thanks for the stories in *Reaching Out*—they work, and so does NA.

IL, Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is S, and I just got finished reading most of your newsletter. I was completely blown away. (I say "most" because the last few pages were missing.)

Every letter I read, I was able to identify with. I am now 16 months clean, and I'm a mentor in a drug program in this prison. I decided to stay on and share the message of recovery that was offered to me by NA. I also stayed on because there is nowhere else in this prison where I could practice recovery like I can here.

My jail mentality kept me alive through my last five prison terms. I've been doing bids since I was 14 years old. The unfortunate part is that the jail mentality doesn't work on the streets.

My last term, I served eight years and ten months on a nine-year sentence, and it took this new five-year term for me to learn this.

I've given my heart to the program of NA. I've done my first three steps four times, and I'm now working on a Fourth Step. I facilitate groups and learn about myself for the newcomers. I can see me in every one of them. I also use "Writing Steps for Recovery," another service offered to us here by one of the area or regional subcommittees.

My sponsor through this program has 15 years clean. I just recently wrote to my old sponsor and home group to begin building a support network for when I'm released.

I cannot do it my way or by myself. I do believe NA is keeping me from doing what I do best—get high, then do time. Recovery has given me my life back. Through NA, I'm learning spiritual principles, and by working my steps I am getting rid of my character defects. I can feel feelings again, and reality isn't so bad anymore.

Whenever I listen to one of the outside members of H&I share their experience, strength, and hope, I too find the strength and hope to continue on. It is extremely difficult to change in an environment that is not conducive to change, such as prison. To me it is worth its weight in gold. I finally like myself, thanks to NA.

Sincerely yours,
SH, Connecticut

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm a grateful recovering addict in the Fellowship of NA. Since I've been incarcerated, I've been able to learn and understand the true meaning of addiction, and now that I've been in recovery for the past four years, I'm still growing, working the NA program, and continuing to find and understand who I am.

Recovery has helped me to be a more responsible person and to change my life from being self-centered to being open-minded, honest, and willing to do anything it takes to keep my recovery.

With the help of the NA Fellowship and the experience, strength, and hope that has been shared with me, I believe in the program if I practice the principles embodied in this program.

My life has experienced a total turnaround since I've become a member of NA, and I've gotten the trust that I haven't had in the past. I thank you, and God bless you.

IL, North Carolina

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J and I am an addict getting better. I am currently in a state facility in Pennsylvania as a parole violator. I have finished 13 months on this violation and I'm going back home in 15 days.

Before my violation I had 12-and-a-half years in prison. I went back to my home town, still an addict, until my violation. My parole agent was going to send me back to prison. I asked to be put in a drug program, and that's how I made it to recovery. I've been in recovery every day since then, and that was over three years ago—and now I'm back in because of a positive urine test. I guess I tested positive because of some of the medications I take for seizures and arthritis.

I don't think the agent had to send me back, but he did because he used to be a prison guard I knew from my past. What really matters is that I did not hold any resentments toward him. I came into prison and went to some treatment-type groups and, of course, some NA meetings. While in this institution, I have done service work every day with the newcomer brothers in the fellowship who have come back on a violation after relapsing. I am a facilitator of NA meetings on my block. We have a weekly meeting on Wednesday nights.

I just want to say to my brothers and sisters in recovery that the Narcotics Anonymous program saved my life. I have real feelings of love, faith, joy, sadness, and excitement, not the painful feelings I had when I was using. Today I experience a full range of feelings, both negative and positive. My selfishness has been replaced by a positive concern for other addicts. Recovery has convinced me I need to change myself instead of trying to change the people around me. I went out and discovered new opportunities that would help put me on a positive path in the here and now.

I've learned to respect myself and others. I've found a sense of self-worth, and I don't fear the unknown anymore. I step out on faith now, and my pride does not stop me from saying, "I can't, we can!"

I reach a point where I no longer want to be just another number. I have to be honest with myself. I have learned to set attainable goals, and I do whatever is necessary to make my life 100 percent better, because I do it in a positive way.

If anyone, any addict, doesn't start here, I mean right where you are, you will be the one who becomes a recidivist and you will be sitting right back in another prison. I, for one, believe in you, and you must let yourself believe in you. It's never too late to make a positive change by carrying the message to another addict, the newcomer. When I do that or see it in someone else, I'm reminded of my own beginning in recovery.

We all can have the opportunity to live by the knowledge acquired by staying clean, working a program of recovery, getting a sponsor, and finding a home group. One of the miracles of recovery is becoming a productive member of society whom you and your family can be proud of and respect.

Today we have the freedom of choice. Please, everyone—including myself, make the right choice that will make life better for you. Work a program to the best of your ability, and that obsession with self will be removed. You will become willing to help others. So remember, give back what was so rightfully given to you.

Love and respect,
JB, Pennsylvania

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is M and I am an addict. I just received my first-ever copy of the *Reaching Out* newsletter. I was so inspired by the personal experiences shared within, the reaching out to addicts, that I was compelled to share my experience. I hope it will reach out to others.

I've been an addict since I was 13 years old, and I'm 55 now. I used until I was 35 years old, and the last few years were non-stop, 24/7, until I was incarcerated (it wasn't lightweight).

For the past 19 years, while incarcerated, I've been able to stay clean. I've turned down drugs because I have faith in God, my Higher Power. I did not attend NA or any other drug-abuse treatment program until the last few years prior to my parole eligibility date. I attended NA, the required 20 sessions, belonged to the progressive recovery program and the design for living program, but that's all I did—*attend*.

I got my first certificates, my goal, so I could make myself look good so that I could make parole. Well, it worked. I made parole, my first ever in 18-and-a-half years, which is a rarity in this state's prison system.

The parole board mandated that I attend self-help groups twice a week as one of my parole conditions. My parole officer also mandated that I attend a state-funded substance abuse program. What a farce, I thought. So I did as I was told; I *attended*. I put emphasis on this because that's the crux of my story.

Here I was, on parole, getting my life together, reestablishing family ties with my remaining/surviving brothers whom I love dearly, falling in love, making good money, etc., and *attending* my mandated NA groups twice a week. But that's all I did: just *attend* so I could get my paperwork signed.

You see, I minimized it and rationalized that my 20 years being clean meant I no longer had an addiction problem, so I felt I was wasting my time. Boy, was I dead wrong!

After completing the required 15 weeks of substance-abuse programming, I asked my PO if I still had to attend NA. He told me if I felt I no longer had a problem, I didn't need to attend anymore. Naturally, I was elated. Another burdensome parole obligation lifted off my shoulders. Two weeks later I blew it, and it was twice the usage

as compared to the old days. Here I was after 19 years, deprived of freedom, working hard for six months to establish a new life, love, and boom—I let go of my Higher Power's hand and used again. I gave a dirty UA and got a violation. So here I am, back in this same hellhole, asking myself: why?

Well, now I know why, and I have NA to thank for that. Once again I am attending NA, except this time around I'm *working* the steps. I am powerless over my addiction and now realize how much I need to rely on my Higher Power and NA.

I now have a sponsor and he is guiding me through the *Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guide*. Wow, what a great workbook. I'm learning so much about the disease of addiction and how it affects my life, and have a great bunch of guys, members of NA, I can turn to at any time for support.

So now I reflect on the perfect vision of hindsight—if only! If only I had taken NA seriously, if only I had worked the Twelve Steps, if only I had sought out help from a sponsor, if only—I would not be where I am now, back in prison and not knowing when I'll be released again. I would not have been abandoned by my brothers and loved ones and friends who all had faith in me and whom I let down because I made a stupid choice.

So now I need to *work*—there's that word again—hard at rebuilding my life and relationships, except this time I'm going to use that 20/20 vision as foresight and remain an active member of NA. It works!

Thanks, *Reaching Out*, for reaching in, and thank you, NA. And especially, thank you, God.

Respectfully,
MM, Arizona

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is S and I am an addict. As a result of unmanageability in my life, I am in jail, sentenced to two years and ten months.

This is the first time in my life that I have been in jail, and hopefully it is the last time. Thanks to my Higher Power I am clean, even if I am surrounded by using addicts in here. All the security doesn't keep the drugs out. Today I am clean.

NA H&I was here some ten years ago to carry the message into this jail. For whatever reasons, the H&I subcommittee stopped that service. For sure, though, there is no NA in here today.

Receiving *Reaching Out* today helps me a lot. Now I have found a way to communicate and be connected with our international fellowship.

In this jail I am a loner in recovery. However, I found some other inmates who it seems would rather go to the gym, like I do, than run around for drugs. Nonetheless, in matters of recovery it seems as if I am the only clean addict, because all of the other addicts are on a drug-replacement regimen.

I did some footwork in order to start a meeting in here, like talking to the priest and asking for a room. Well, sad but true, is that it seems to be easier to get drugs than it is to start a meeting. Activity for inmates is supposed to be under control, and Narcotics Anonymous seems to be unknown, at least at this facility.

So my last resource is this meeting in print, the *Reaching Out* newsletter, and also my Higher Power. Thanks, NA, and my best wishes to everyone.

SZ, Germany

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is C, and today I am a grateful recovering addict. I am presently serving time for a drug charge at a federal institution in South Dakota. This is my second time in prison due to the poor choices I made while using drugs. I certainly don't have the answers today, but I do know that the NA program works when I work it.

I have been in and out of the NA program for several years. Whenever I have experienced any extended periods of clean time in my life, it has been when I've been involved with NA. I have now been clean for more than four years, and I thank God for each and every one of those days. I realize that I've been fortunate enough to have another chance at life while many others haven't, and for that I am truly grateful.

Next year I will be released from prison. I will be starting my life over in a city I'm unfamiliar with. I have inquired about NA contact information for this city and plan to begin corresponding with an NA contact person. I plan on meeting many great people there in NA; these are the people I choose to be around today. I know that no matter what happens in my life, I have a choice to stay clean, one day at a time. Thanks for allowing me to share.

CB, South Dakota

FROM THE OUTSIDE

Editor's Note: This section is dedicated to aiding H&I subcommittees to gain a worldwide 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. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the message on the inside, and are now out in the community. Members and H&I subcommittees should send their input to the WSO, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999, USA.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello. Here's my favorite true H&I story. I first heard the message of NA while in a Southern California jail. The seed was planted, and years later I found myself in a treatment facility when H&I was announced. I attended that panel weekly and started going to meetings every chance I got. I never stopped. When I had six months clean, some folks in meetings started asking me to share in facilities. One guy, S, took me into a local detox once or twice a month. Just after I had a year clean, this guy asked me to attend the H&I subcommittee. He said I could meet other panel leaders there, etc.

When it came time for him to report, he reminded the committee that he was moving and could not continue being the panel leader. At this point I clearly remember him saying, "How about this member, he has a year clean and six months' H&I experience. I think he'd like to be the panel leader." Then a bunch of folks with time I respected were clapping and saying, "Oh, great!"

After some interrogation I was elected a panel leader. Bushwhacked by the NA railroad!! I thank my Higher Power. So here's the point: At about 18 months clean I had the worst day (or so I thought!) of my recovery. Everything went wrong. I had a horrible day at work. My boss called me into her office and went off on me for having a rare bad sales day, etc. I got dumped by her.

Man, by the time I got home I felt low. My self-esteem was in the sewer. My mind was telling me that being clean would never last and I was running a game on myself.

Then I remembered I had my panel. I did not want to go, but I had speakers lined up. So I did what a lot of us did at 18 months: I

made the outside look good. I put on my brand-new snakes (boots) and a nice new pair of black Bonnaroo jeans. I looked good. Hey, if the outside looks good, so what about the inside, right?

So I'm in the detox, wishing my panel members will finish up so I can go home and sulk. I'm looking at one of the guys who came to the panel. He's sitting straight across from me in his detox plastic robe and slippers, and he's changing colors, mostly shades of green, and he's trembling. I'm looking at him and thinking, "Oh, this is just great. What a day. This guy's going to have a seizure."

Just as I am thinking that, the guy doubles over and just spews vomit all over my boots and jeans. And I'm not talking normie vomit. You know what I'm talking about if you are an addict; I don't need to get too descriptive.

I could have thought, "This day sucks—I give up," but I got a moment of grace. A feeling went through me, and I was reminded that I was the lucky one. I was the miracle. It is better to go into a facility as a member of H&I and get puked on than it is to be detoxing in a facility and throwing up on an H&I member. I got to leave that night.

I'm coming up on 17 years, and I still do H&I. And while I've come to understand there is only one form of service in NA—carrying the message to the addict who still suffers—H&I will always be special to me. The nature of the disease results in many of us tasting an institution before we get to meetings. And people who do H&I are the first to get to see what happens to addicts who quit going to meetings, because we often see them attending our panels! Thanks, NA. And thanks, H&I.

With more gratitude and less
attitude,
RS, Washington

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. Send us a letter addressed *Dear Reaching Out*. 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. Please keep this in mind when you write to us.

If you are a member of an H&I subcommittee, let others hear how you or your subcommittee 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 PURPOSE!!



H&I Learning & Awareness Days Coming Up

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 flier or notice to the WSO.

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
January 2006	15 October 2005
April 2006	15 January 2006
July 2006	15 April 2006
October 2006	15 July 2006



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



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

Reaching Out

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available free of charge to incarcerated addicts through the World Board of Narcotics Anonymous. It contains letters written by Narcotics Anonymous members who are in hospitals or institutions or are 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 \$31.00, the subscriber will receive 20 copies of the *Reaching Out* newsletter each quarter.

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