

Payvand's Iran News ...

Narcotics Anonymous in Iran

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Some time ago I went to see an interesting gentleman in central Tehran . His name is Siamak; he is the coordinator and in charge of NA World Services Office in Tehran [1] . Yes, you may not know it but NA (Narcotics Anonymous) has a branch office in Iran , one of the only 4 official offices in the world ( **NA Iran** - [www.nairan.org](http://www.nairan.org) )



I came to learn about NA Iran [2] through a friend whose husband had become one of the NA members and now he is a devoted contributor and sponsor. I have known the family for many years and I was so impressed in the changes that I have seen with him.

During the meeting, Siamak told me that NA Iran was formed 11 years ago by a few guys, all of whom had previously attended NA program steps in California and had become CLEAN. Then, when they came back to Iran they decided to start a branch here too. In the past 11 years the center has grown very fast and Siamak and two other friends, Farzin and Farhad, are devoting all of their time and energy to making the Iran center one of most successful ones in the world.

I asked permission to attend one of the open meetings (those that non-members can attend). I was told that there was one near my house, near park Mellat at the local Behzistie (welfare organization) building which takes place at 6pm on the first Wednesday of every month. I missed a couple of months but last month I was able to go to one such meeting and I am not exaggerating how impressed I was with the whole thing.

The hall was packed. Outside there were many young and old volunteers guiding you, answering questions or helping to sell or offer different organizational translated books, pamphlets etc. This was nothing compared to the great sense of unity and comradeship that one felt so strongly inside the hall. NA works closely with Behzistie offices all over Iran and they put notices for their open meetings on the notice boards of these offices. There is a white pamphlet which lists all NA regular meetings all over Iran .

***There were men and women, young and old. I saw boys and girls in their late teens there. I saw mothers, wives who sat there quietly smiling or crying from joy or pain. It was one of the most touching events I had been to in my life.***

If you live in Iran you know someone or someone's someone who struggles with (mostly) his or her devastating addiction. As hope evaporates, and as the sense of alienation with oneself and one's dreams escalates, the pain leads many to the terrible and deadly path of addition. The false life through Hollywood or MTV or the most unreal life through local TV channels increases this sense of being left behind or what the hell in going on with my life. Drug addiction starts from taking simple things for fun and then there is no limit. In Iran despite whatever the authorities may try to do, addiction is the cause of great social problems, and like other places in

the world it has ruined many lives and families in Iran .

In the hall I heard a few speakers of different ages and backgrounds called up to tell the audience their story and how and what happened to them. The chairman of the meeting called on those who had been clean X number of days, weeks, months and years. Then I heard young men and women calling their name first as an addicts and then say to the audience with joy or pride how long he/she has been CLEAN for, X number days, weeks, years; and then everybody would encourage them by applause. At times if he/she was clean for a certain amount of time, he/she would receive a flower which then that person would offer to someone whom they felt helped them most or suffered because of their addiction most etc. Needless to say that although about 35-40% of the audience were women most of the speakers were men.

Outside after the meeting was over couple of hours later, I met and saw addicts on different stages of being CLEAN looking for their sponsor/support and talked to them as they were extremely close to that person. I met sponsors and addicts of either gender. I learned that there are meetings for women alone and also special meetings for the families of the addicts that take place regularly.

The Iran center follows the same principles as the other centers and with endless zest and efforts of their members and volunteers, they translate, produce and distribute many booklets and pamphlets and other items as well as setting up daily, weekly, monthly meetings all across the country. The center, due to local needs and requirements is in the process of officially registering their NGO. The Iran office and associate offices, like all others across the world, is completely independent and self-sufficient and is run on donations by members and proceeds from the sale of their books as well as their marketing items such as shirts, cups and so on. It is a non-profit social group of men and women for whom drug addiction had become a life-threatening problem. They meet regularly to help and support each other in order to stay clean. I was told that at NA what the person has done, or how much or why is not the concern. All that matters to them is that one admits there is a problem that you wish to eliminate and they are there to give the individual their help and support to overcome the problem.

It may come as a surprise to you all, as it was to me, that there are over 30,000 men and women who have successfully been on NA Iran program. There are over 750 meetings a week in Tehran and over 3200 in other parts of Iran . These meetings can take place anywhere, in parks, public places such as hospitals, Behzistie common rooms, other local authority buildings such as cultural centers. They even have group meetings in prisons. Because of their success rate and way of thinking, anti narcotics organizations as well as police and welfare organizations and hospitals grant them their support and assistance in letting them to use their premises. Some of these meetings take place as early as 6 in the morning and some as late as 10 in the evening. Most of the meetings are closed ones, which means only members who are addicts can part take. But there are few, mainly once a month in most areas where it is open and non-members are allowed to go and become familiar with the work and efforts of the organization. At such meetings many who want to join and their families or the families of those who are already members attend. At all these meetings nobody wants to know what is your real name or what you do. All they want to know is what you want to help yourself and they are there to help and *support* you in order to overcome your addition. The organization believes that only an addict can help another addict, therefore, all together we stay CLEAN.

The way the system works is that once you choose to enter their program, you find yourself a mentor/sponsor to stand for you and give you support as you start on your famous 12 Steps (The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous are used on a daily basis to help us to overcome our disease) [3] . Through the program you improve your self respect and self worth and constantly you are supported by other members and especially your chosen sponsor. As part of the central program there is a great emphasis on practicing spiritual principles. However, there is one rule and that is total abstinence, including alcohol.

I was informed at the office that the dropout rate is very low in Iran which is a good sign and shows the success of the Iran Center . Their hard work has paid off most successfully. When I asked why this is so, I was informed that the social and cultural set up and the close family relationships and sense of sacrifice that exists in our

culture helps those who take this path and increases their chances of success. According to the Narcotics Anonymous latest report on their website ( [www.na.org](http://www.na.org) ) there are over 30,000 addicts who have joined the Iran program and the Iran program has been one of the great success stories ever since NA started up in the late 1940's.