

REACHING OUT

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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 K_____ and I am an addict. Currently, I am incarcerated in a prison for women in Illinois.

I was introduced to the NA program about six months prior to my incarceration and I am extremely grateful to have the steps of the program to rely on during my time in prison. I was very resentful because after finally finding a new way of life in NA I was sentenced to five years for crimes I had committed prior to recovery. Though it may sound funny, I now am grateful for this time. I was using recovery the same way I had used everything else in my life. I used it to show the world how "great" I was. How my family should forgive me because I was an addict and that was the only excuse I needed for all the things I had done. Today, I see it another way. Yes, I am an addict, one who suffers from a disease, but my recovery is not about gaining forgiveness from others. To me, it is about self-discovery, owning my actions, forgiving myself.

It is difficult to recover in prison. It is hard to find other recovering folks to share with. There is no NA at the prison in which I am incarcerated. So I write my sponsor. I read what I can get concerning NA and recovery and now I write to *Reaching Out*. So far, I have ten months clean.*

I know that *Reaching Out* focuses on positive recovery stories, but some of these days have been "white knucklers" for me. Days when my belief in my Higher Power was the only way I got through without using or taking my own life. But I'm alive and I'm clean.

There are tools I use today. I live just for today, and it works. I also tell myself that "this too shall pass." I try to remember that even if I were free, if I was still using, I would be back in that old prison of my mind. It took coming to prison to find freedom. Freedom from addiction, freedom from myself.

I still am not communicating with my family, but I am communicating with my Higher Power and myself. Through the steps, I have found choices that I never knew existed. I don't have to use. I don't have to react with anger. I don't have to lie, steal, or blame. I can, if I choose, stay clean, be honest, be nonreactive and also take responsibility for myself. I cannot do these things on my own. It was difficult to admit powerlessness, but once I did, I realized I was not alone, and things got better. Today, when I have a situation where I can choose to lie or tell the truth, choose to steal or do without, choose to use or stay clean, I can ask for strength. I can see the choice instead of just doing it as always. The saying "once an addict, always an addict" is not true for me today. I am grateful to realize the insanity of my addiction—that is, to expect different results by doing the same old things.

I've seen NA change lives and I want what the folks in NA have. To work through the insanity of addiction I think of this: "If I always do what I've always done, I'll always get what I've always got." Acceptance is the answer to my problems today, a belief that every person, place, thing, or situation is exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Acceptance helps me live in the present and be grateful.

So today I concentrate on what I need to change in myself and

* Article received in August, 1992.

I rely on my Higher Power to walk me through not only the rough spots, but also the good moments. I am grateful for the choice of a new way of life. I am also a grateful addict. It's a good feeling to know I'm not "bad," just an addict who can change. Hope is what the program is about for me.

In recovery,
K., Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is S_____ and I am a recovering addict.

I used to be involved in a lot of corrupt activities. Thanks to Narcotics Anonymous, I have gained back my self-respect. NA has shown me that fellowship and sharing are definite routes to achievement and success in society. Through my sponsor and NA speakers, I have regained trust in my life. I would like to express my appreciation by sharing with anyone who may read *Reaching Out* that these are stories from those who really care about your recovery and have suffered the same headaches you may be experiencing. Believe me, you are not alone. Through NA and *Reaching Out*, you will experience the fellowship that will help you to sustain your recovery. It has greatly helped mine and if you keep coming back it will work for you too. Remember, just for today you have a brand-new you to help those that need your help as you get the help you need, too.

S.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Let me start by introducing myself for we have never met. My name is _____ and I'm an addict. I'm a Chiracowa Apache and I will share later how this fits in. Now, the reason for my writing. My cellmate received a copy of the Basic Text, *Narcotics Anonymous*, from the World Service Office and it must have been really interesting to him because he brought it to my attention.

However, I was uninterested and turned away. As I drifted off to sleep I heard him speak five words, "An Indian without a tribe." When I woke up, he was at work so I picked up this book

and looked through the contents and, behold, there it was, those five words. So I read the story and, behold again, it was so much like me that it brought a tear to my eye, for I am an addict.

The only problem is, he found his tribe. I haven't as of yet. I'm paroling soon and if I don't go looking for help right now, I'll be coming right back to this prison.

You see, it's so much easier to be an addict now simply because I have been diagnosed as having full-blown AIDS that I acquired in prison six years ago and they still can't cure me. So, I tell myself: If drugs don't get me, AIDS will. I'm going to die anyway."

After reading that story in the Basic Text, I'm telling myself something different: "If I don't stop using, the using will help AIDS kill me quicker." I'm tired of prison, and I'm tired of using. With AIDS, I don't know how long I have left. My plans were to get out and run from the gate. But I read more of the Basic Text and I know running won't help. So I'll break my pride and ask for your help, for NA's help. I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, and I know I'm going to die, but I want to die clean. Thank you for the Basic Text.

Anonymous, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is E_____ and I'm the chairman of the NA group at a state penitentiary. We get an occasional copy of *Reaching Out*. The guys here tell me I should write a piece for the newsletter, but I can hardly read, let alone write! I'll give it a shot, though.

I began using back in 1955 in Hong Kong when I was a deck hand on a ship. Because of that first fix, I've spent close to thirty years in prison. I'm one of those addicts who don't like to sleaze around. I rob to get money to use. The last time I fell in 1973 as a four-time loser. I was on the yard for about thirty days when I took another convict's life over a drug deal. While I was in the hole facing charges, I finally snapped, "Maybe I have a problem with drugs."

I decided I'd better do something about it. So I joined NA and have been going to meetings whenever and wherever possible

since, with a few ups and downs along the way. Being in NA all these years, and seeing people come and go, I've come to a conclusion: If you don't live the NA program, and I mean *Live It* by going to NA regularly, working the Twelve Steps, and getting a good strong sponsor, you'll either die or spend the rest of your life in prison like me!

I've never known what it's like to have a home, a family, or a Christmas tree. I've never been able to go do what I want. The bottom line is this: use and die or maybe move in next to me, or stay clean and take your kids to the park. I don't know what is in store for me, but I do know that just for today I never have to use again. Thanks NA.

E., Wyoming

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I want to share a little about myself with you all. I'm an addict having problems trying to face things. I'm learning more about myself, just for today. I want to express my gratitude to NA for showing me the power of honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness.

I'm in a treatment program where I was introduced to NA to begin with. Looking at what I've become and using the tools given to me by these peers and counselors, my self-esteem has been given a tremendous boost. The truth is that, while I may not last in this treatment program, I'll not stop my attendance at NA. The spirit of true care and concern felt in NA meetings have moved me so much that I'm drawn to them. I'm tired of being sick and tired. I've been shown through the steps that turning my will and life over to the care of God as I understand Him will not make me invisible.

Fellow NA members continue being winners, not quitters. I've learned how important it is to take an inventory to keep from making the same mistakes over and over. What keeps me living is working the steps daily. I'd like to keep in contact and will continue to share every time I get a letter. I keep in touch with my Higher Power in order to make it. You all do the same because it works.

Yours truly,
LC

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, I'm an addict and my name is M_____. I wanted to write to thank NA and the "we" that makes my recovery possible.

I'm twenty-nine years old and presently incarcerated in a county jail in Florida. I started using when I was about nine years old. NA is not new to me, however, I am a newcomer. I am in jail due to a relapse. I had almost three years clean when I fell back into denial and started using again. I was rescued by a power greater than myself whom I call God. It is truly a blessing that I am alive and here. My addiction tried everything it could possibly do to kill me.

You've heard the expression "some are sicker than others." That's me. Once I started using again, I could not stop on my own. For once, I was grateful to see the blue lights and siren behind me, for I knew the pain of using drugs was over.

For those who have never experienced relapse, I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you that it doesn't get any better, only worse. The progression of this disease is deadly. When arrested, I was almost physically, spiritually, and mentally dead. I believe that had I stayed on the streets using for one more week, I would not have been able to write this letter today. I would be dead.

My relapse actually started about one year before I started using. The suggestions of the program became unimportant to me. I started doing it my way and thought I was "okay." I placed my hobbies and my business in front of my recovery. That's why I introduced myself as an addict before my name. I have to remember today that I'm an addict before anything else. My disease is all-inclusive. It's not just about the dope. As I substituted one addiction for another (hobbies, business, etc.), I slowly quit working a program of recovery. Meetings, sponsorship, and the steps no longer took priority in my life. I thought because I was financially successful, with the toys to prove it. I was okay. Today, I know that "social acceptability does not equal recovery," as it says in our Basic Text.

Today I have a new freedom. I still have some rough days,

but I have a way out called the Twelve Steps of NA, and my sponsor. Thanks to the steps, I have a relationship with my Higher Power that is second to none. He takes care of me when I can't do it for myself. I attend meetings here thanks to the H&I subcommittee and look forward to each one. Without NA I would not be clean, nor could I cope with the pressures of incarceration. I'm only locked up on the outside. Inside, when working the NA program, I have a chance to be happy, joyous, and free. I know relapse is not a requirement for NA membership, however, I am grateful for mine. I have started a program today which is stronger than before. Thank you NA and the H&I subcommittee.

Yours in recovery,
M.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is T_____ and I'm an addict. By the grace of God, I'm a recovering addict.

I am presently excluded from society (I'm in prison) and awaiting transfer to a program for addicts. This is my fourth term in prison and with what NA has given me—a new perspective on life—my last term, I hope.

I found out that being around other addicts who are seeking help through NA removes a lot of stress. There's always someone who relates to what I'm saying and cares about what I said. One of the first things I found out is that you can't stay clean by yourself or by hanging out with the homeboys. You've got to be with other people who are following the Twelve Steps NA has provided us with.

It's taken years of pain and heartbreak for me to realize that I had a very serious drug habit. I've lost my family, my girlfriend who I had planned to marry someday, and basically everything I ever cared about, all for just one more high.

I believe it's never too late to change your life. NA has changed my life and given me another shot at being something besides a convict and user. Whatever hand life deals me, just for today, I won't use.

Thank you NA for giving me self-esteem and teaching me how to love myself so that I may love others as well. As each day passes, my recovery grows stronger. Thank you.

Sincerely,
TR, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I would like to take this time to express my thanks for NA and your services. NA is playing a vital role in my recovery from addiction. Let me fill you in on my situation, briefly.

I am thirty-three years old, and I am presently serving a four-year sentence. My drug use has been going on for approximately twenty-two years.

During my first few teenage years, I did the usual experimenting with different drugs. Then, at the age of seventeen all the experimenting ended. I thought I'd found what I was looking for. Little did I know that I was embarking on a journey that would last over fifteen years, take me through some of America's toughest neighborhoods, and almost completely ruin my life.

For most of the last ten years, I have bounced in and out of county jails and drug rehabs. In 1983, I wound up in a hospital for over a month, spending the first six days on the critical list with an eighty-percent chance of dying from pneumonia, hepatitis, and endocarditis. Two months after leaving the hospital, I was strung out again and running the streets of New York worse than ever. Four-and-a-half months after leaving the hospital, I was arrested (rescued). After spending nearly two years in jail and a rehab, I was released only to continue on this journey.

Then, last year, I was arrested and the system finally stopped giving me a break. I was in as bad a condition as I was back in 1983 when I almost died. I was walking death. My body just didn't know enough to lay down. Ten days after my arrest I went to an NA meeting here and openly cried and asked for help. The guy who ran the meeting gave me a hug and told me to keep coming back. And I haven't stopped. I have become

closer to my Higher Power, God, than I ever was. After four months I made bail and for three months I was a regular at NA meetings on the street. I was sentenced and I had to return to jail, but I was finally released from the drug prison I'd been in for twenty-two years. My journey with drugs has finally ended.

I got lucky. God provided me with a strong and supportive woman and the tools (NA) to straighten out my life. He has given me a third chance at life (the hospital in 1983 was my second). Some people never get a second chance. If my story ever winds up in an NA publication, my advice to any reader on a journey like mine is to give yourself a break. Try NA. Go to one meeting with an open mind and listen. You will meet some very good people who've been down the same road. They just may help save your life. They helped save mine.

In closing, again, thank you so much for being there for me and others. May God bless you all.

One day at a time always,
TG, New Jersey

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is V_____ and I am incarcerated in a Maryland Detention Center. I am serving an eighteen-month sentence that stems from drugs.

I have attended almost all the NA meetings that are brought here from the outside. I know if I was not given time to think about my addiction, I would not want to hear what these ladies have to say about recovery.

Now, I am very interested because I can hear about recovering addicts outside this facility who are making it. It is definitely an inspiration to watch their faces go from the sorrow they once felt to the freedom they now enjoy. I am eager to share the same freedom.

On the outside I have a fourteen-year-old son who is patiently waiting for mom to come home clean. I have explained to him that I will have to attend meetings to stay clean. He is not interested in this but is willing to care for himself while I go. That in itself is a help.

I would like to thank the NA fellowship for continuously

coming here to spread the good news that there really is life after active addiction and incarceration. Recovery has become a part of me that I expect to grow—first into a friendship and then into a marriage—where I, too, can help the still-suffering addict.

Thank you for listening. With NA's support, I know I can make it in a clean life.

Sincerely,
VD, Maryland

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict and my name is B_____. I am presently incarcerated in a correctional facility. I am in a drug program where we have an NA meeting. The meeting is just inmates with no one from the outside or any counselors. It is a good NA meeting. It gives everyone a chance to express themselves, to identify and share their pain, anger, happiness, and loneliness.

I wish it didn't take jail to make me realize that NA and the Twelve Steps could help me live again. When I was using, I was locked up far worse than I would be in any jail. I'm thirty-one years old and, at the same time, I am like a child. I'm growing up and experiencing new feelings every day. I'm finally living life on life's terms. I thank God every day for the day that I coped and did not use. I now have hope that my future can and will be okay. I never thought I would have inner peace. But I'm getting it a little at a time. Thank you NA.

WC, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J_____ and I am a recovering addict. I am forty years old, and I have a long record of jails and institutions. My story is not much different from most. I started off using drugs because of peer pressure. Using drugs was a confidence booster whenever I had feelings of inadequacy. I used to suppress all the bad feelings I had. I have hurt numerous people in many ways. I lied, I cheated, and I took what was not mine. I committed crimes I would never have done if I had been clean.

Once I was in prison or jail, I would find "the man" and continue my abuse as if I were still on the streets. Yet in all the years of this madness, it never once occurred to me that I was an addict. I always thought my trouble was the police, snitches, and a lot of "rotten luck!"

When I came back to prison this time, I was told that, since I had a drug charge, it was mandatory for me to attend the NA meetings. My initial impression of NA was that it was for the weak and it was boring. But it was "mandatory," so I would put up with it. Then I began to go on a regular basis and, after a while, I began to listen. I can't adequately express the difference it has made in my life, since. From my first meeting, I realized that the person everyone was talking about was "me!"

I now realize the full impact meetings have on my life. The therapeutic value of sharing, listening to others, and the wealth of knowledge from their experiences in recovery cannot be achieved in a clinical environment, cannot be achieved by abstinence alone, cannot be achieved by desire alone. But it can be achieved (if you want it bad enough) through the NA process of "one addict helping another."

With the help of my Higher Power, NA is the controlling factor in my life. I have begun to work the Twelve Steps of NA, and I am convinced that, through NA, I can now live a productive, clean, and drug-free life. Something, until NA, I never thought possible.

Sincerely,
JB, Tennessee

Editors Note: This section is dedicated to aiding H&I subcommittees to gain a worldwide perspective of H&I activity. It reflects input received from H&I subcommittees and may address specific issues of interest to members in their H&I efforts, as well as personal experiences obtained through carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. Therefore, we are asking members and H&I subcommittees to submit input for this section to the H&I coordinator at the WSO, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999.

FROM THE OUTSIDE

Dear Reaching Out,

I just read your latest issue (July '92) and felt inspired to write something about H&I. I'm a "lit wit," but deep inside there is an "H&I guy." I remember going to support a prison meeting 160 miles away with less than six months clean, and I remember starting H&I meetings in three treatment centers by the time I had two years clean. I was even a regional H&I chair for a year early in my recovery. Not bad for a guy who spent a total of four days in jail while he was using.

Anyway, I had a recent series of meaningful experiences that reminded me of the importance of H&I work. I normally support one or two H&I meetings in my home area every couple of weeks. For several months, this guy would come up on weekends to attend our Sunday noon meeting, and he would keep saying that he needed someone who spoke Spanish to support the prison meeting back in his home area. There were several interested Spanish-speaking addicts incarcerated there who were not getting the message of recovery because all of the meetings were in English.

At the same time as this, the WSC had decided to fly representatives of the fellowship from Peru and Argentina to the World Service Conference in Dallas. I was also a participant

at the conference, and I met these two guys and decided to try to speak Spanish with them. I had sent a letter two weeks before the WSC, in Spanish, to the prison in Illinois. I had some hesitation in doing this, because it had been a long time since I had spoken or written Spanish. Anyway, it turned out that I was pretty fluent, in fact I spoke Spanish in a restaurant, much to the dismay of the waitress. Realizing that I was somewhat conversational, and with some fear, I decided to try to conduct a meeting in Spanish at the prison in Illinois.

The local NA community in the area were putting on a H&I event at the prison, and, when I caught wind of this, I volunteered to go. It was one of those things where a few members had been carrying the load, and the inmates wanted to hear a wider range of recovery experience. So I went, and when the time came, held the first NA meeting in Spanish at this facility. I say first, because I've decided to continue coming and sharing.

It wasn't so much what I said during the meeting, but what I heard. The men that attended the meeting said some real special things about gratitude, a Higher Power, and the steps. Things I needed to hear. Again, I was grateful for the journey of recovery, because I had just experienced another one of those "moments," a special sharing that only can be given from one addict to another. I hope that, in the near future, the meeting will become a regular thing, instead of a "special event." There are no foreign languages in the language of the NA way.

If it wasn't for the H&I effort, none of this ever would have happened. Over the past ten years I have been clean, I have attended H&I meetings at least once every two weeks for most of those years. I've seen meetings come and go, and I have felt the joy of a new member going to his first outside meeting. There was no H&I, in fact, there was no NA in my local area while I was bouncing around the treatment and psych center trip. Now that there are meetings, I feel a desire to be there. No matter how much I give to NA, it can never be enough. The thing I like the most about H&I is the fact that gratitude is made so

visible so quickly, and it's very personal! I have seen some of the toughest characters imaginable get the NA message and stay clean, drop their attitudes, and live happy, productive lives. There may not have been H&I for me in the years of painful active addiction before I found NA, but there is now. I know that many days of my recovery have been made possible by H&I, and I can look forward to many more gifts through H&I work.

Keep the fire burning,
CM, Iowa

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J _____ and I am an addict. I recently attended an H&I meeting at a correctional institution in Louisiana, a prison where I should be doing time. But, by the grace of God and NA, I was there doing service work instead.

When I first found NA I went back to tell my old playmates about NA. I relapsed and got busted within four months. While in jail, I asked God for another chance and he gave it to me with probation.

I went back to NA. At six months clean my sponsor suggested that if I wanted to tell people about NA then I should get involved with H&I. I did and now, two-and-a-half years later, I want to tell *Reaching Out* what H&I service work has done for me and my recovery.

Through H&I, I have gained a sense of purpose. Other than being a responsible, productive member of society, my purpose now includes helping other addicts find a better way to live.

I never thought much of myself before I got clean. However, at six months clean, the committee voted me in as a panel leader. A year later they elected me literature coordinator and now, another year later, vice chairperson of the subcommittee. Their trust has given me a sense of self-worth.

In the last two-and-a-half years I've seen NA in my area almost triple in size. I believe this has happened because H&I gives people like me the opportunity to tell other people about our new life in Narcotics Anonymous.

In loving service,
JP, Louisiana

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am an addict and my name is B _____. This was a relief to learn, after seven years of active addiction. I wasn't crazy. I wasn't bad. I was sick. While living in a halfway house, I was taught about the disease of addiction and a program of recovery called Narcotics Anonymous. Parents that I loved couldn't teach me. No one I knew could help me. It took perfect strangers, men and women I had never seen before, to explain to me, to teach me, to empathize with me. These people were not therapists or counselors, but recovering addicts who took time out from their busy lives to hold H&I meetings at a halfway house in the middle of nowhere.

These men and women were the first people I had come in contact with whom I could relate. They knew everything about me, how I felt, what I had done, what I wanted to do, and they had never even met me before. It later occurred to me that the reason they knew so much about me was that they were exactly like me and I was just like them.

I spent four months in that halfway house listening to the message of Narcotics Anonymous in H&I meetings and outside meetings. Those four months served as the foundation of my recovery. I got a sponsor, a Basic Text, and phone numbers. I used all of them. Because of H&I, I found out that I never had to use again. For that knowledge, I am forever grateful.

I try, to the best of my ability, to express my gratitude through service work. I try to give back what was so freely given to me, a message of freedom from active addiction. I became involved on our area H&I committee with four-and-a-half months clean and have been active in H&I at one level or another for the past forty-four months. Service to NA, through H&I, isn't about pats on the back or ego trips. What it is about is watching that light bulb come on in a newcomer's head, that same bulb that came on in my head four years ago. "Just for today, if I follow this way, I have nothing to fear." Just for today, through NA, I never have to use again.

In loving service,
BP, Ohio