

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

(Page 57-61 Public Relations Handbook)

Drug courts

What are drug courts?

Many people convicted of nonviolent drug-related crimes are sent to Narcotics Anonymous as a result of court diversion programs. Drug-court professionals added twelve-step programs as a part of this alternative treatment because they are effective and there is no cost. Twelve-step programs were a part of studies that resulted in NA being seen as a viable option for addicts. As a result of those studies, referrals to NA meetings from drug courts have increased significantly in recent years. Drug court programs (or similar programs) are being established around the world. The specifics of these programs may vary in different communities, but the premise is similar.

Drug courts (or court diversion programs) have made a significant impact on Narcotics Anonymous—so much of an impact that the World Board created Bulletin #31, “Meeting Attendance Cards.” Addicts often hear NA’s message of recovery as a result of the criminal-justice system. This does not mean that NA’s relationship with drug courts is free of challenges. Groups and ASCs that take a proactive approach to their relationships with drug courts seem to be more successful in dealing with the impact of drug courts on the local NA community. This section focuses on ways in which groups and ASCs can build relationships with drug courts as part of their efforts to carry NA’s message of recovery.

NA’s relationship with drug courts

Being proactive means letting court officials know what the NA program is (and isn’t) and what NA can (and cannot) do. We want to create cooperative relationships with drug courts while honoring our traditions. Having area discussions helps members become aware of the potential impact drug courts can have on local NA meetings. These discussions give members an opportunity to offer input and find solutions for how to handle attendance cards, accommodate numerous newcomers attending local NA meetings, and build relationships with drug-court personnel.

Area discussions about drug courts

Following are some points the ASC can consider when discussing ways to be more proactive with drug courts:

- 📄 Invite drug-court personnel to participate in a roundtable discussion with members of the ASC. These discussions can focus on ways to better help court-ordered attendees. Court

officials can be educated about NA meetings and the NA program, and trusted servants get an opportunity to learn about drug courts.

- ☞ Drug-court personnel (including prosecutors, probation officers, parole officers, police officers) need to know that NA is a viable resource for addicts (since they often have initial interactions with addicts in the community). The area could place posters in police stations, probation offices, or parole office waiting rooms.
- ☞ Discuss which meetings might be best suited to handle a large influx of court-card attendees.
- ☞ Create newcomer workshops to help newcomers understand the NA program, especially at the courthouse, parole center, or other similar settings. Newcomer workshops can be helpful in smaller areas that may have NA meetings with fewer members. Newcomer workshops are similar to panel presentations in that trusted servants provide information about NA in a structured format. A committee can use the *Institutional Group Guide* to start meetings at drug courts that may later become self-contained and self-supported.
- ☞ NA members can discuss the role a judge may play in referring addicts to NA. A judge may monitor a client's recovery and be actively involved—this may mean that a judge requires a client to have a sponsor, do step work, and get a group commitment. If a judge attempts to require a sponsor to come to court, however, the boundary of cooperation has been crossed, because the sponsor is not under the court's jurisdiction. We can refrain from requests that conflict with either our traditions or our civil rights. Judges and institutions are not responsible for conducting themselves in accordance with our traditions—that responsibility falls on us.
- ☞ ASCs can sometimes participate in government training programs for drug-court officials. By participating in such training, giving presentations, or organizing an exhibit, a large number of new officials are given a clearer understanding of NA's role, challenges, and abilities.

What an area can communicate to drug-court officials

The ASC can communicate the following points to drug-court officials during initial interactions:

- ☞ Clarify that NA is a voluntary recovery program, not a treatment center.
- ☞ Describe what occurs during an NA meeting: We pass out keytags to recognize clean time, we practice sponsorship, there are various meeting formats, etc.
- ☞ Discuss the principle of the Seventh Tradition with court officials so they educate their clients about what this principle means in NA. This may mean that court-referred addicts help put away chairs or contribute money in the Seventh Tradition basket.
- ☞ Communicate with the appropriate court staff (often the court coordinator). These professionals usually decide how many meetings the court-ordered attendees need to attend, and judges usually monitor this decision. Communicate information about which meetings can best accommodate a large influx of attendees.
- ☞ Provide up-to-date meeting schedules and helpline numbers.

- ☞ Suggest that courts purchase NA pamphlets and other NA literature to give to their clients.
- ☞ Invite drug-court personnel to attend open NA meetings.

Desire is not a measurable commodity. It lives in the heart of each individual member. Because we can't judge the sole requirement for membership, we are encouraged to open wide the doors of our meetings to any addict who wishes to join. We are asked to extend to others the care and concern that helped each of us find a sense of belonging. The Third Tradition helps NA grow by encouraging us to welcome others.

It Works: How and Why

Meeting attendance cards and NA groups

There are several reasons why members seem to get uncomfortable about court-ordered attendees at NA meetings. One reason is that Narcotics Anonymous, as a fellowship, does not participate in the surveillance of its members; another is that the idea of forced attendance seems to go against some of our core philosophies. Many members, however, have found NA through parole and other forced-attendance programs, including treatment facilities. It is not up to us to decide if someone is ready to get clean or if they are a member of NA. Many addicts who did not initially want to attend NA meetings ended up staying in NA as a result of forced attendance.

There is also the very practical reality that drug-court referrals can affect a group's atmosphere of recovery and can drain a group's financial resources. It may be helpful to remember that our literature says that we don't care where an addict comes from. Groups can ask themselves if eliminating the attendance of those referred by drug courts is really the best solution. The following ideas can help groups discuss solutions to the real challenges they face with drug-court referrals:

- ☞ The group may want to take an inventory. This inventory could focus on how ready and able the group is for drug-court referrals. Although increased attendance can overwhelm the atmosphere of recovery, a group may want to consider its attitude toward those who are court referred. Is the group open and welcoming? Some court-mandated clients may not be addicts or may not be ready to admit that they are addicts. The group can ask themselves if they are practicing NA's Third Tradition.
- ☞ A group can look to see if the format of the meeting is suitable for a large influx of new members. A group that has a participation format may decide to structure the meeting format in a way that better serves newcomers, such as a newcomer workshop, speaker meeting, or question-and-answer format. Even after all these considerations, a group may decide that the meeting cannot accommodate those with meeting-attendance cards. The group would then communicate this to the ASC or the committee in contact with court personnel. NA groups that decide not to sign court-attendance cards can be listed in the area meeting directory so they aren't mistakenly attended by court-referred clients.

Tradition Three: *The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.* All addicted persons are welcome and equal in obtaining the relief they seek from addiction; every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis.

- 📄 The signing of cards is providing a service to addicts. The NA group is not participating in surveillance. In NA's early history, every meeting was under surveillance. Asking the police to stop surveilling meetings so that addicts would not be afraid to attend them was one of our fellowship's first cooperative PR actions; if we find that meetings are under surveillance again, we can take similar actions. In signing court-attendance cards, groups are verifying attendance as a service for addicts, not for the courts. The confidentiality of the addict will be respected; we strive to treat court-referred members in the same way that we treat other NA members.
- 📄 In some instances, members may be concerned that addicts with court cards are leaving meetings early. Fortunately, it is not our responsibility to monitor whether or not a court-referred member stays for the entire meeting. To discourage these members from leaving early, however, some groups collect cards when the Seventh Tradition collection is passed and return them at the end of the meeting. If the group is uncomfortable with signing cards, then they may want to consider alternatives like a group stamp.

The strength of our relationship with the criminal-justice system has the potential to make a difference in the lives of many addicts. Strong relationships are built on clear communication, reliability, trustworthiness, and ongoing dialogue. We practice our primary purpose of carrying NA's message to suffering addicts in our service efforts with the criminal-justice system.

Resources

- Area Criminal-Justice tracking log
- Criminal-Justice letter
- Panel request form
- Sample newcomer workshop
- FAQ for criminal justice

Organizational contact suggestions

- Drug courts
- Correctional facilities and jails
- Forensic units
- Police/sheriff
- Education/training (law schools, drug-court training, criminal-justice education programs, police academies, etc.)
- Professional associations (specifically national and international)
- Probation/parole officers