

Reaching Out



January 2019



Jakarta Convention 2016

Welcome.....	2
From the Inside.....	3
From the Outside.....	10
Transitioning.....	13
Order Form.....	16

*“Addiction is **not** a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery.”*

Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous

From the Editor

We would like to welcome all of you to the NA World Services newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We hope that the contents of this newsletter will assist you in your recovery or H&I efforts. There are three sections to *Reaching Out*. The first section, "From the Inside," is filled with letters from incarcerated addicts, sharing their experience, strength, and hope as they find and maintain recovery from addiction through NA.

The second section, "From the Outside," is an opportunity for Hospitals & Institutions subcommittees to offer their 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 NA message on the inside and are now living and enjoying life on the outside.

The third and newest section, "Transitioning from the Inside to the Outside," features members sharing about successfully transitioning from treatment, a hospital, or an institution to living on the outside.

We encourage submissions for *Reaching Out* from members and H&I subcommittees. Please consider that we are more likely to publish articles that focus on how NA has helped an individual to recover while incarcerated rather than those that concentrate on the horrors of drug use. Send all submissions to *Reaching Out*; NAWS, PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999; USA, or to fsmail@na.org.

GET INVOLVED AND HELP US CARRY OUT OUR FELLOWSHIP'S PRIMARY PURPOSE!!

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
April 2019	15 January 2019
July 2019	15 April 2019
October 2019	15 July 2019

And finally, did you know that electronic subscriptions to *Reaching Out* are free? New issues will be emailed to you four times a year. To sign up, visit www.na.org/reachingout.



From the Inside

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is MO and I am an addict. This is my first time in prison, though I have been in jail several times in my life. I started using drugs at the early age of 17. When I reached 24, my life hit rock bottom. My mom had died while I was in jail and my life was at a standstill. It was then that I decided to put an effort into getting clean.

I ultimately moved away and put together eight years of living clean. However, the entire time I was clean I slowly fell back to my old ways. Within a year I was loaded again and on my way to prison. Just for today, I am taking each moment for what it is. I have been clean over four months now, and I couldn't do this without the program called Narcotics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps. They work if you put some serious work into them. Just for today I am in recovery

MO, Washington, USA

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is RAN. When I read about the thousands of stories or hear someone sharing their experience, strength, and hope, I realize that toward the end of every single one of the stories they are the same. Sure, some of the stories have different descriptive words—words like misery, pain, hopelessness, desperation, and disparity—but they all have three places in common: jails, institutions, and death.

Today is my birthday, and I am sitting here in my cell writing this letter to you. This is my second year of a ten-year sentence with a five-year stipulation. I am 56 years old today, and this is where I have ended up with my addiction. I am a United States

Army veteran with twelve years of active duty and one combat tour. The three tours of duty left me with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder. I also am left with a very painful back and hip problem.

I never thought of myself as an addict. Sure, I used drugs in my life, but never considered my using to be a problem. With the three tours leaving me this way, I was prescribed 15 psych medications as well as three different types of pain medications from three different doctors, but I kept telling myself I was not an addict. Two years ago, I was sitting in my living room feeling a little depressed, so I took a few pills. Then I popped a few more pills to help me sleep. I became a zombie, I'm sure. I don't remember much, but two days later I woke up in a police station cell with five serious charges including aggravated assault, theft, robbery, and burglary, and still saying I was not an addict.

I knew then that I had to change my life, and I knew I could not do it on my own. When I was transferred to the county jail, I ran into an old high school friend who was going through his own problems, but he seemed to have a little pep in his step. He was more positive and upbeat. That's when he told me about how he got in touch with his higher power through NA, so I signed up.

I found out how much I had in common with others in the meetings. Yes, my life was unmanageable for a very long time; I just did not see it in that light. Every time the H&I panel comes, I am the first one to be there, front and center. I share my experience, strength, and hope with the new inmates. I have a sponsor and continue to reach out to my higher power for continued guidance. Before I forget, my name is RAN and I am an addict. Thanks, NA, for showing me how to live again.

RAN, New Jersey, USA



Prison in Georgia. Unity Day meeting, World Convention 2018, Orlando, Florida. There were 23,000 attendees with more than 100 prisons participating in the Unity Day call.

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is DR and I am an addict incarcerated for three and a half years now. I have 16 months to go. I recently changed prisons and have been here for nearly six months. I originally got clean in 1992 and was on the ground floor in a newly established area. That area had just five meetings per week in the beginning. When I was arrested in 2013 after 21 years of being clean and hard work, that area boasted nearly 40 meetings per week.

This is my third relapse. Only four hours of using, and I picked up a case. Where I am now is a place of humility. I came to prison judging my peers for not being able to stay clean in a locked environment, but was given a new set of eyes to view them through this past weekend. There is only one H&I meeting here a month. The same people come every month, and there are some people who hear their message for the first time ever.

Only two units out of six have weekly meetings with inmates. I listened instead of preparing ahead of time what I would share. I mean I really listened. I heard a woman share how she would manipulate the parole board into letting her stay because she thought she couldn't stay clean on the outside. She felt like she needed more time. I heard another share that everything was in its place and she was looking forward to release. After ten years in prison, she was going to a two-year program.

I will never understand how you can stay in this circle of buildings and not use. It is as if my higher power has given me another chance to go home and get it right this time. Maybe this time I will listen and spend less time sharing. After more than two decades in this program, I am no longer a baby. I have so very much to learn. Trying to keep clean and alive.

DR, California, USA

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is SB and I am an addict incarcerated in a women's correctional facility. My clean date is 25 May 2013. I had three and a half years clean because I stayed involved in service work and going to meetings. I would like to tell you more, but at this time I can't process the words to put on paper. It's been over three years since my last use, and the only thing that has kept me clean is this fact.

At three and a half years clean, I went looking for my husband who left me for another woman with a sack of dope. When I found said husband, whom I loved dearly and totally, dope was there and I picked up again. No tools, thoughts, or tapes played back in my head. After all I had learned, I went down the drain. Not even seven hours after taking that first hit of the drug of my choice, I was arrested.

I am now doing a 22-year stint. I got graced with 22 years, but the person I hit while running from the police didn't and died. He is no longer alive. I am still dealing with that one single thought, that and the other question of why am I still alive. I know my Higher Power which I call God has a plan for me. Forgiveness of self is a daily struggle.

Here at the women's correctional facility we have but one meeting a week, and I make it a point to go to every one of them. I share so every person, young or old, won't have to live with the lesson I'm having to learn. I will end up with this: 22 years is a blessing for me. Not only did I get to keep my life, but I could have ended up with a 35-year-to-life sentence. I pleaded out to a murder two charge instead of vehicular homicide.

Remember, what you are most afraid of is only a hit away. Narcotics Anonymous has given me the strength and hope to share my experience so others will maybe learn from mine. With hope from the inside.

SB, Washington, USA

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is SF and I am an addict. First and foremost, I would like to thank my higher power and my wonderful sponsor. She is an amazing woman. I have been incarcerated three times now, and this time set me down and I have definitely learned my lesson. My life in addiction was a one-way ticket to the pits of hell. I am so lucky to be alive today. I have been down three years this time and still have three more to go. I never pictured myself being here again, but I believe everything happens for a reason. I believe that this is my final chance at recovery. If I was still out there getting high, I would not be alive today. I am surrounded daily by temptations. I pray and I know I no longer need drugs to be happy.

I am no longer looking over my shoulder. Narcotics Anonymous is the reason why! I am grateful for all the knowledge I get from my sponsor and from the literature she sends me. We write back and forth and I do my stepwork and send it to her. Narcotics Anonymous has helped me make amends to my mother whom I haven't seen but once in ten years. It gave me hope that I could fix my life.

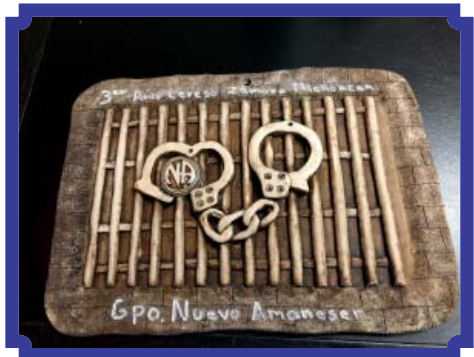
I believe deeply that every saint has a past and every sinner has a future. I know that thanks to NA I will have a promising future free of drugs as long as I keep doing the footwork and keep grounded. I am so grateful that when I walk out of these gates I will have six years clean and be happy to say the struggle was real but worth every step of the journey. I know it works when you work it and I remember to take it one day at a time. Just pray. Thank you, NA, for helping me to rediscover who I really am — a mother, daughter, and the woman I am becoming

SF, North Carolina, USA

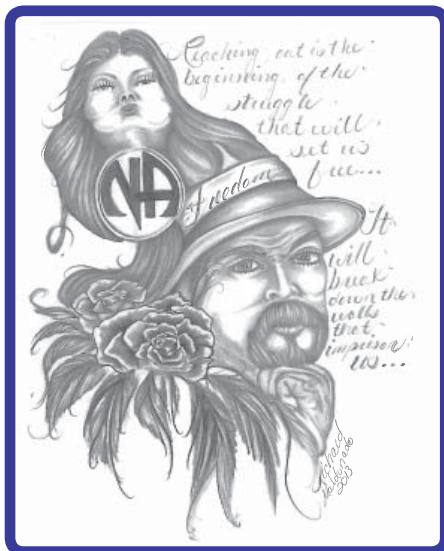
ART FROM THE ZSIDE

Many NA members, groups, and communities design recovery-oriented art. We believe that carrying the NA message of recovery is a creative act, and images provide a powerful message of the freedom we can find in NA.

If you would like to see your art printed here, please send jpeg or pdf files to Handl@na.org, or mail to Reaching Out; c/o NA World Services; PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409, USA.



From a prison in Mexico



Inmate, California, USA



From the Outside

Dear Reaching Out,

Hello. I'm an addict who left the jail and never went back, yet it took me 102 arrests to achieve that. I've been clean now 25 years. I have my family and children back in my life. I created a nonprofit organization to help youth stay connected with their parents.

It wasn't easy for me to give up my old ways of life. I thought I would die in the streets of New York City. Trusting God and having a sponsor to guide me through the Steps and Traditions saved my life. Going to NA meetings still makes sense after 25 years of being clean.

Listen, if you want your life to change, you have to make changes to your thoughts and behaviors as well as people, places, and things: get new friends, go to new places, and find new things to do. It's a challenge, but any addict can do this because I did it.

I'm an addict living life on life's terms without the use of drugs. I love my life today because of NA.

NM, New York, USA

Dear Reaching Out,

I am an addict named RM. I am excited to be able to write and share some of my experience, strength, and hope. I was in active addiction between the ages of 15 and 31. During that time, I was in and out of rehabs two times and the penitentiary a total of three times. I was the type of addict who would lie, cheat, and steal from my own family to support my habit. When I used, absolutely nothing else mattered. It was during my last run that I found myself homeless on the streets, sleeping in stairwells and

stealing from gas stations just to be able to eat. Any money I got went straight to the pipe.

Eventually, in May of 2013, I was arrested for burglary and sent to prison for my third time. It was at this time that I was blessed with the gift of desperation and finally was able to see that every time I used, I ended up in prison. Lucky for me, my mother came to Narcotics Anonymous in 1989. As a kid I would attend meetings with her and was no stranger to the rooms. As I sat in jail awaiting sentencing, our literature began to come alive in this addict's mind. I was finally able to see that through my inability to accept personal responsibility, I had been creating my own problems. All I understood at the time was that I was ready to do whatever it took to stay out of jail, even if it meant to stop using.

The judge sentenced me to three years, and I vowed to use the time given to attend meetings if they were available to me. While in prison, I met an inmate who had a passion for NA. I knew he had done more drugs than me and had spent more time than me, so I asked him to sponsor me. He put me in contact with Narcotics Anonymous World Services which sent me a Basic Text and information for my regional H&I. Eventually that inmate was transferred to another yard, but in his absence regional H&I stepped through the doors through Sponsorship Behind the Walls.

I was assigned a sponsor and worked the Steps with him for the remainder of my sentence. It was because of his commitment to NA that I became involved with service. Today I am an active member in my community, attending meetings regularly and being of service. Today I give back to the program that gave me a new way of life. I am privileged to be able to take a meeting into a Department of Corrections facility that works with parolees. NA's promise has become true in my life. I have lost the desire to use and found a new way to live. Thank you, NA.

RM, Arizona, USA

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is LG and I am an addict. My clean date is 6 March 2007. Right now I am taking a break from work to write this letter. I am working at the same treatment center where I got clean. I love being clean and I love Narcotics Anonymous. As far back as I can remember I was always a frightened, insecure, obsessive, and compulsive person. Drugs had taken over my entire life and I could not stand the feelings of uselessness, emptiness, and complete and utter despair that I lived with.

The first day of my release from treatment I went to at least two meetings, and I continued that for my first 90 days. I remember feeling so lost, desperate, and afraid. I didn't want to use anymore because I was convinced I would die if I went back to using again. I always had a tendency to go after everything in my life with everything I had.

It wasn't until I had asked someone to be my sponsor, read the literature with him, and worked the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts that I really experienced the gift of recovery and the miracle in my life. Before I did that I had lost everything I had pursued. I am grateful for Narcotics Anonymous coming into the treatment center. Those members who were committed to telling newcomers about NA led me to be convinced that the most important thing I needed to do was get connected to the NA program and the people living it.

I am grateful for my sponsor and I love my sponsor. Through sponsorship, I have experienced a relationship like no other that has taught me so much about being effective in every relationship in my life. That daily support has been so vital to my process. I have been through job losses, injuries, getting an education, the birth of my son, and raising him as a single father. I've gone through divorce, relapse of those I love, and patient struggles of reaching for a better life. I have come so far from where I was and sometimes feel as though I am in a desert. Today I have bigger hopes and dreams. The NA program has taught me that I can find happiness again.

LG, Indiana, USA



Transitioning from the Inside to the Outside

Dear Reaching Out,

I am 24 years old and an addict. My name is CH from Oklahoma and I am in a rehab for my use of drugs and alcohol and am beginning the transition process. I have three kids, two of whom are in the system. My oldest son is with my dad. I love NA and what it has done for me in my recovery process. I attend meetings every day, and each time I listen to people share I get emotional. I read the Basic Text, and each time it is something that deeply touches me. I am still on Step One and trying to grasp the reality that I am an addict. I have come to realize that yes, I am powerless over my addiction and need some structure to rid myself of the evils that prevail in my brain. NA has given me some insight.

I cry and share my story in the hope that someone like me will get the help they so desperately need and deserve. Each day I learn a little more about myself. I have become more compassionate. Through NA I know that I am not the only one who suffers. I opened up to complete strangers and they did not judge me. They cry with me, and they express feelings; I found my new family in recovery. I feel at home. One night at the NA meeting I told my story and was told by the others how proud they were of me to open up. One man told me, "Welcome home."

When my kids were taken from me, I stayed high to conceal my feelings of shame, guilt, pain, and suffering. I found in here that I no longer have to do that. I have never felt so much love as I do in the rooms. We all stand together in this life of recovery, and that's what families are supposed to do. I cannot put into words how much I love NA, but I can tell you it has brought me new hope. I know I can do this and stay clean. I also know that I can't do it alone. Today I don't have to. I have a loving family and Fellowship to help me.

As I sit here I always remember the saying, "one is too many and a thousand is never enough." I love that today I am making a change for the better. It is scary and not easy, but well worth the try. Every day I have to work on my recovery and do it one day at a time. Thank you for letting me not be alone.

CH, Oklahoma, USA

CALLING ALL H&I MEMBERS!

Please submit your story to the quarterly NA newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We are looking for recovering addicts, like you, to share their experience of finding recovery behind the walls and maintaining it on the outside. Your story carries a powerful message of hope for the incarcerated addict! Thank you.

Please send your story to:
Narcotics Anonymous World Services;
PO Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409,
or to HandI@na.org.



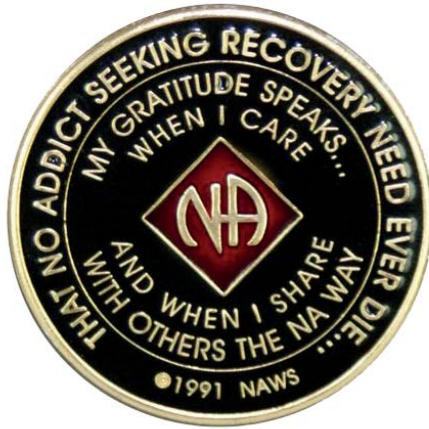
Transitioning from the Inside to the Outside

Whether you left a treatment center, jail, prison, hospital, or institution, you are moved from the “inside” to the “outside” to be drug-free, productive members of society. We think your experience may be invaluable to others as they embark upon their transition.

We are offering questions to help stimulate your thinking so that you may want to share your experience with us; we will publish your article in *Reaching Out* to help others.

1. What did you do on the first day of your release/discharge?
2. What steps did you take to help your recovery in the community? Do you think the transition steps are the same for addicts who are released after 30 days as for those who are released after ten years?
3. What are some of the challenges you encountered when you reentered the community?
4. How did NA help you with information so that you were able to attend a meeting upon release/discharge?
5. How do you think NA may have been better able to help you in your transition, and do you have any suggestions to offer so that NA may be better able to help others as they transition?

We look forward to reading your experience and providing this information to others. Thank you for helping us assist others in their transition.



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.

Narcotics Anonymous, "We Do Recover"

Order Form

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available free of charge to incarcerated addicts through Narcotics Anonymous World Services. If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months and would like a free subscription to *Reaching Out*, complete and return the following form.

Reaching Out is also available by a 20-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$38.05 annually. If you are interested in purchasing a bulk subscription, please complete the following form and return it along with a check or money order.

- I am an incarcerated addict (*and will be for at least six more months*) and want a free subscription to *Reaching Out*.
- I want to purchase _____ 20-copy bulk subscriptions of *Reaching Out* @ \$38.05 each, total \$ _____.

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www.na.org/reachingout

ATTENTION INMATES

If you are relocating and your mailing address changes while you are incarcerated, please update your address with us so that we can maintain your subscription to *Reaching Out*.