

Narcotics Anonymous: A Vision of Hope on the Inside; Living the Vision on the Outside

Theme: Narcotics Anonymous: A self-help resource in the correctional setting and a way of sustaining recovery upon release into the community

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Narcotics Anonymous program and its volunteer efforts. Our presentation will share information regarding NA volunteers in the correctional system. Their function is to introduce inmates, who are substance abusers, to recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Additionally, we will highlight the importance of community-based recovery programs that assist felons with living drug-free upon their release. Emphasis is placed on providing an alternative to substance abusers that may help reduce their recidivism.

What is Narcotics Anonymous

Narcotics Anonymous is a nonprofit fellowship. Our membership is free. We offer a program of recovery to anyone who has a desire to stop using drugs. By following the program of recovery offered in Narcotics Anonymous, our members have found a way to live drug-free as responsible and productive citizens of society. The program of NA consists of guiding principles, as outlined in our literature, *It Works How and Why* and the Twelve Concepts for NA Service. Outlined in *It Works How and Why* are the Twelve Steps that are for individual members to use as a personal program of recovery and the Twelve Traditions that are principles for the groups. The Twelve Concepts serve as guiding principles for our organizational structure.

Narcotics Anonymous is not affiliated with other organizations, including other Twelve Step programs, treatment centers or correctional facilities. As an organization, we do not employ professional counselors or therapists. Narcotics Anonymous has no residential facilities or clinics and does not provide vocational, legal, financial, psychiatric or medical services.

We recognize that NA is but one organization among many addressing the problem of drug addiction/drug dependency. Our members have significant success in addressing their own addiction, but Narcotics Anonymous does not claim to have a program that will work for all addicts under all circumstances or that its therapeutic views should be universally adopted. In order to maintain its focus on a program of recovery, NA does not express or endorse anything outside its own specific sphere of activity. NA does not express opinions, pro or con, on religion and civil, social, medical, or legal issues such as criminality, law enforcement, drug legalization, prostitution, HIV and free needle programs. We keep our focus to what we believe is our realm of expertise-that of one recovering addict helping another. If Narcotics Anonymous can be useful to the inmates in your facility, and we are available in your area, we welcome the opportunity to be of service.

Narcotics Anonymous Growth

The rapid growth of registered Narcotics Anonymous meetings in recent years and the rapid spread of NA outside of North America are prime indicators of the program's

success. In 1978, there were fewer than 200 groups in three countries. By 1983, the Narcotics Anonymous program of recovery had reached more than a dozen countries with 2,966 registered meetings. In 1998, we knew of groups holding 24,685 weekly meetings in ninety (90) countries.

Primarily due to NA's emphasis on protecting the anonymity of our members, no comprehensive survey of the Narcotics Anonymous membership has been completed to date. In 1989, we conducted an informal poll of our members and had 5,000 respondents. The information gleaned was of gender and age of our members. Our members were 64% male and 36% female. The predominant age was between 30 and 45 (48%) followed by 20 to 30 year olds (37%).

How Narcotics Anonymous Works

Narcotics Anonymous believes that one of the keys to its success is the therapeutic value of recovering addicts helping each other, and in particular helping the new member. The most common venue that affords this assistance is the NA meeting. In meetings, each member shares personal experience with living life drug-free with others who are in attendance at meetings. Formats may vary (topic, speaker, book study) from meeting to meeting but all essentially have one thing in common, an atmosphere of hope and empathy. Meetings may be classified as "open" to anyone or "closed" to members and those who believe they have a drug problem.

A fundamental suggestion is for members to seek a sponsor. A sponsor is an experienced member who offers informal assistance to a new member on how to remain drug-free and gives suggestions on how to work a program of recovery.

The Narcotics Anonymous program of recovery uses a simple, experience-oriented 'disease concept' of addiction. Narcotics Anonymous does not qualify its use of the term 'disease' in any medical or specialized therapeutic sense, nor does NA make any attempt to persuade others of the correctness of its views. Rather, the NA fellowship asserts that its members have found acceptance of addiction as a disease to be effective in helping them in their recovery.

NA Volunteers - What Services Do They Provide?

NA volunteers provide services based upon the type of request and the number of available volunteers. On many occasions the request is for information about NA and how to obtain NA literature. However, the most common request is for volunteers to make a presentation to a facility's administrative staff and/or residents or inmates. Our volunteers' primary purpose is to advance awareness of the NA program to anyone seeking recovery from drug addiction.

We provide support to those inmates who think they have a drug problem or a history of chemical dependency. The volunteers from the NA program share their personal experiences about utilizing the NA program to live a drug-free life. This exposure to the NA program and NA members can have an appreciable effect in reducing recidivism by reassuring the incarcerated individual that upon release there will be support in helping to continue their recovery. Our experience as a fellowship has shown that this identification and association are vital. Narcotics Anonymous provides an opportunity to each

individual to improve the quality of his/her life, both inside the facility and after release from the facility.

Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) Meetings

H&I meetings/presentations, except for those in longer-term facilities, are intended to simply introduce some of the basic principles of the NA program to inmates who have a history of substance abuse and who do not have full access to regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings in the outside community. In many cases, the NA H&I meeting complements the facility's substance abuse program by providing contact with other recovering addicts and an atmosphere to share experience, strength, and hope with living life drug-free.

Sometimes correctional administrators and/or substance abuse program staff will contact NA through a local NA helpline/phoneline number and request to have an H&I meeting/presentation in their institution. Once we are contacted, a representative usually calls back to set up an appointment. If we are unable to support a meeting/presentation at that time, we explain that at the appointment and that we will nevertheless, maintain communication. We may also provide NA literature, our product catalog, and inform them about some of our publications, one of which - The Institutional Group Guide - is specifically designed for starting and sustaining meetings in an institutional setting. At other times the local H&I subcommittee will approach a facility to propose a meeting/presentation but this will occur only if they are prepared to provide the members to support such a meeting.

How Narcotics Anonymous H&I Meetings are Conducted

NA H&I meetings in correctional facilities will vary in format from one facility to another. Facilities will have different policies that we must take into consideration when planning a format or bringing NA volunteers to the H&I meeting. Our goal is to provide an atmosphere where the NA message of recovery is carried and shared.

We have experience carrying the message of recovery in both short and long-term facilities. We use the phrase "short-term" to refer to facilities in which inmates are held for less than one year, and includes some city and county jails, work farms, honor farms, and privately owned prisons. Because these inmates will be held for a period of some months, we usually share about experiences in early recovery. We feel it is important to give practical information about the NA program of recovery since inmates tend to get involved in discussing what they are going to do about recovery when they get out. We feel that recovery need not depend on, nor require, a particular living situation. We try to impart the understanding that we can remain drug-free under all situations and that the time to begin recovery is now.

We consider facilities in which addicts are sentenced for more than one year to be "long-term" facilities. Inmates in these facilities are more likely to maintain their recovery while incarcerated, so in this type of setting we encourage increased participation and sharing by the inmates. Their participation can be anything from setting up the chairs for the meeting to starting the meeting. In a long-term facility this H&I meeting may be the only NA recovery these addicts will experience for years. Encouraging them to be more directly involved helps them follow the program throughout their incarceration. The type

of profound changes in an individual's attitude, thinking, and behavior, brought about by working the NA program can have a positive affect on others around him/her. Inmates who become involved in their recovery get the opportunity to start practicing a new way of life before their release. And, by following a daily program, transition to the community can be a more positive experience.

Transition from Incarceration to the Community and How NA Helps

An inmate's chance of sustaining recovery and avoiding recidivism is enhanced with a planned community transition. Some of the practical information provided by our NA H&I volunteers will help this. We strongly encourage that inmates make a change in what we call "playmates, playgrounds and playthings" since these familiar surroundings can lead to relapse. To help support the recovering addict we provide meeting directories, NA phonenumber numbers, and urge them to attend a meeting the first day upon release so they can become connected to new associations immediately. Sometimes NA members in the community choose, as individuals, to arrange to meet inmates upon release. This is not a service provided by our NA H&I volunteers. But once an inmate arrives at their first NA meeting in the community, phone numbers are given and exchanged among members. We suggest that the recently released addict find a sponsor - a more experienced NA member who will share their suggestions for following the NA program. Attending daily NA meetings also will help acclimate them to this new way of living without drugs and provide needed support in coping with "life on life's terms."

NA H&I meetings also are available to work release, halfway houses, honor camps, and those facilities which house inmates after their release from jail or prison and before they are allowed to fully re-enter society. Because their program schedules allow for limited attendance at outside NA meetings, such facilities usually have a low priority for H&I subcommittees. In that event, we still provide information and access to the NA program through local meeting directories and the World Service Office Product Catalog. For a copy of our product catalog please contact our international headquarters listed below:

World Service Office
PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409
Phone: (818) 773-9999
Fax: (818) 700-0700
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