



Another option to reduce recidivism through access to Narcotics Anonymous Meetings

Theme: Narcotics Anonymous: a self-help resource in the 'correctional setting' and a way to sustain recovery upon release back into the community

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Introduction

This paper has been designed to introduce you to some aspects of the NA program; services that NA can offer for incarcerated substance abusers, ways we can work with your facility and how NA can assist in reducing recidivism for inmates with substance abuse problems who are returned to society. We hope to provide you with a simple easy guide towards establishing an NA meeting in your facility. We will cover what we call Hospital & Institutions (H&I) service and highlight some of our literature.

This Paper Covers:

- Who and what is Narcotics Anonymous
- How NA Works
- What NA doesn't do
- What is a NA meeting
- What is a Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) meeting, and how it helps
- Conducting H&I meetings in a correctional settings
- Various formats for correctional settings and appropriate NA literature
- NA meetings in correctional settings (how to start and sustain)
- Transition to the community and how NA can be a part in reducing recidivism

Who and what is Narcotics Anonymous

Narcotics Anonymous is a nonprofit organization, our membership is free; and we offer recovery for anyone who has the desire to stop using drugs. By following the program of recovery offered in Narcotics Anonymous, our members have found a way to live clean (i.e. our terminology for drug free) as responsible, productive members of society.

NA is not related to or affiliated with other organizations, including other Twelve Step Fellowships programs (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon, Naranon, etc.), treatment or correctional facilities. 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 keep our focus to what we believe is our special "expertise" that of one recovering addict helping another and we leave other things to those professionals who do them best.

How NA 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 newcomer (i.e. the new NA member). In meetings, each member shares personal experience with others seeking help, not as professionals but simply as people who have been there themselves and have found a solution. The closest thing to an 'NA counselor' is the sponsor, an experienced member who gives informal assistance to a newer member.

The Narcotics Anonymous program uses a very 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 view. The NA movement asserts only that its members have found acceptance of addiction as a disease to be effective in helping them come to terms with their condition.

One more thing needs to be said about the Narcotics Anonymous program. Its members recognize that NA is but one organization among many addressing the problem of drug addiction/drug dependency. Members feel they have had significant success in addressing their own addiction problems, 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. If NA can be useful to the inmates in your facility, and we are available in your area, we stand ready to be of service.

No comprehensive surveys of Narcotics Anonymous membership have been completed to date, primarily due to NA's emphasis on protecting the anonymity of our members. However, it is possible to offer some general, informal observations about the membership and the effectiveness of the program.

Of the 5,000 NA members responding to an informal poll taken in 1989:

64% were male

36% were female

11% were under 20

37% were between 20 and 30

48% were between 30 and 45

4% were over 45

The only sure indicator of the program's success is in the rapid growth in the number of registered Narcotics Anonymous meetings in recent years and the rapid spread of NA outside North America. In 1978, there were fewer than 200 groups in three countries. In 1983, more than a dozen countries had 2,966. In 1994, we knew of groups holding 19,822 weekly meetings in seventy countries.

What is an NA Meeting

A Narcotics Anonymous meeting happens when two or more recovering addicts meet together for the purpose of recovery from the disease of addiction. Meetings are conducted by recovering addicts for addicts with the primary purpose to provide experience, strength and hope for its members.

Hospital and Institutions (H&I) Meetings and how they help

The purpose of an H&I meeting/presentation is to carry the NA message of recovery to inmates who have a history of substance abuse and who do not have full access to regular Narcotics Anonymous. H&I meetings/presentations, except for those in longer term facilities, are intended to simply introduce those attending to some of the basics of the NA program.

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 brought in. Once we are contacted, a representative usually calls back to set up an appointment. If we are unable to support a meeting/presentation at this time, we explain at the appointment that we cannot service their request and will maintain communication with them. We also may provide NA literature, our product catalog and inform about several of our publications, one of which is specifically designed for institutional settings. At other times the local H&I subcommittee will approach a facility to propose a meeting/presentation. This will only occur if they are prepared to support such a meeting.

NA offers a message of recovery from addiction through the program Narcotics Anonymous, providing an opportunity to each individual to improve the quality of his/her life, both inside the facility and after release from the facility. We provide support to those inmates who think they have a drug problem or a history of chemical dependency. In many cases, the NA H&I meeting compliments the facility substance abuse program by providing contact with other recovering addicts and an atmosphere to share experience, strength and hope. Our experience as a fellowship has shown that this identification and association is vital to the individual getting clean and sustaining their recovery. This type of cooperation can have a appreciable effect in reducing recidivism in addicts, by exposing the incarcerated addict to the NA program and members. This type of interaction helps reassure them that upon release there will be support in helping them continue their recovery.

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 members to the H&I meeting. We strive to provide an atmosphere where the NA message of recovery is carried and shared. We have experience carrying the message of recovery in a variety of settings both short and long term. The phrase "short term" is used to refer to facilities in which inmates are held for less than one year. This will include 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. Inmates may 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 learn in Narcotics Anonymous that we can stay clean no matter what and that the time to begin recovery is now.

We consider facilities to which addicts are sentenced for more than one year to be long-term facilities. Inmates in these facilities are more likely to be maintaining their recovery while incarcerated. In these types of settings, we encourage increased participation and sharing by the inmates. That participation can range from setting up the chairs for the meeting to opening up the meeting. In a long term facility, this H&I meeting may be the only NA recovery these addicts will experience for years. By allowing them to be more directly involved forms a common bond for them to work the program within and throughout their stay. The type of profound changes in an individual's attitude, thinking and behavior, brought about by working the NA program, can have a positive effect on others around him. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that you can follow them in your daily life, whether incarcerated or in the community. By encouraging the inmates to get involved now, we provide a simple program to follow and allows them the opportunity to start practicing this way of life before release. By following a daily program, transition to the community can be a more positive experience.

Various Formats in Correctional Settings

Different formats are used in NA H&I meetings in different facilities. Most begin in the same way with the H&I member introducing themselves, reciting a 'NA Reading' and explaining the purpose of this H&I meeting. This is usually followed by the inmates reading some standard NA literature that is used to commence H&I meetings. Short-term facilities (1 year or less) can have a wide range of meeting styles to choose from. The format varies from speaker presentations where one or more NA members share their story, panel presentations where several members share on one aspect of recovery, and topic discussions where NA members and the inmates share on a topic. In addition, utilizing a question and answer format has proven to be helpful. A long-term facility (1 year or longer) may also choose to have a NA program study meeting that focuses on the Twelve Steps of NA recovery. Inmates can then benefit from the experience of NA members who have learned to apply these spiritual principles in their daily lives. Regardless of the format style, a question and answer period at the end of the meeting always proves useful.

Most H&I meetings will have NA literature on a table for the inmates to take with them. This literature will assist them in their recovery. One of the most important items we can offer an inmate about to be released is a local NA meeting list. This list indicates the time and location of NA meetings near their destination. The most important literature we can offer is our book titled Narcotics Anonymous, commonly referred to as the Basic Text. This book contains all of the 'basics' of the NA program and can be considered our primer for recovery.

NA Meetings in Correctional Settings

Through the use of drugs many addicts have found themselves in some sort of institutional setting. The physical isolation of these facilities separates those within from the rest of society. These institutions may be either treatment or correctional in nature, although the line is becoming blurred as more and more correctional facilities begin to provide some type of drug treatment for their inmates. While some institutions have no contact with H&I subcommittees, a great number of them are served by local H&I subcommittees. Most H&I meetings are held weekly. In many long-term facilities, this is the only NA meeting available to our members. If our longer standing members on the "outside" feel the need to attend more than one meeting a week, it would probably benefit our incarcerated members to do the same.

Our experience is that NA meetings that are not H&I meetings develop for different reasons and from a variety of sources. Often, NA is not available at all until our H&I committees conduct a series of panel presentations. Sometime later, staff professionals or inmates start an NA meeting. Sometimes meetings in a correctional setting result from one or more recovering addicts becoming incarcerated. Also, professionals who have learned about NA through our public information efforts start NA meetings in various settings. It is apparent that most of these meetings are regular NA meetings that adhere to the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous as best they can. Likewise these incarcerated addicts are members in every respect as long as they have the desire to stop using drugs and are entitled to the same consideration and support as any other member. The only thing that many of these NA meetings lack is being a part of and gaining support from the local NA fellowship and service structure. It is important that the inmates be empowered to conduct their own meetings. Guidance in how to do that, helping them with the format of an NA meeting, supplying them with a room or safe setting to hold their meeting, guidance with the supply of NA literature to use (until such time they can acquire/purchase their own) and helping with procedures is very useful.

They can be linked to the rest of NA through the World Service Office. The World Service Office can provide a single point of contact to help facilities communications and unity through correspondence and access to our NA literature. Such contact can prove invaluable in helping overcome isolation and provide a resource of experience to draw upon. More importantly by reaching out, the NA members incarcerated can begin to feel a part of and gain some understanding of how to maintain their meeting and prosper. In that regard they will help ensure that those addicts that find themselves incarcerated, have a place to come and find change through the Narcotics Anonymous program.

Transition from Incarceration to the Community

The type of transition back to the community can effect an inmate's chances of sustaining their recovery and avoiding the chances of recidivism. Some of the practical information provided by our NA H&I members can help. We strongly encourage that inmates make a change in playmates, playgrounds and playthings. All these familiar surroundings can lead to relapse. To help support the recovering addict we provide meeting directories and NA phonenumber numbers

to call. We encourage them to attend a meeting the first day upon release so they can become connected to new associations immediately. Some members choose, as individuals, to arrange to meet inmates upon release. Because most facilities discourage giving out phone numbers, this is not a service provided by our NA H&I members. Once at a NA meeting in the community though, phone numbers are given and exchanged. We strongly suggest that they find a sponsor who is a more experienced NA member willing to share experience in staying clean and living the NA program. The NA sponsor can provide assistance to the newcomer in several ways but primarily aids in applying the NA Program of recovery in their life. Attending NA meetings daily will help acclimate them to this new way of life and provide needed support in living life on life's terms.

We also provide NA H&I meetings 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 regarding enter society. Some of these are privately owned and operated, but residents are still considered to be in custody and risk being returned to prison for infractions of the rules. Because their schedules allow for limited attendance at regular NA meetings, such facilities 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 our product catalog. For a copy of our product catalogue, please contact one of our following service centers.

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