

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS THE NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS PROGRAM?

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N.A. is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovered addicts who meet regularly to help each other to stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only "One" requirement for membership, the honest desire to stop using. There are no musts in N.A. but we suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles, written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that "They Work."

There are no strings attached to N.A. We are not affiliated with any other organizations, we have no leaders, no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious, or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us regardless of age, race, color, creed, religion or lack of religion.

We are not interested in how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

The organizational structure of Narcotics Anonymous is quite unlike that of any health or welfare agency known to us. N.A. practices may vary from place to place. All N.A. services are performed voluntarily by the addicts themselves and without cost. N.A. does not accept money for its service, it is not funded by any public or private sources or agencies. Accepts no contributions from non-N.A. sources. Billions can be spent and not do half the good of a knowing smile and the warm feeling we get from our meetings and the warm feeling of our fellowship. Addicts respond instinctively to honest sharing. The fact that the addict can feel the unconditional love and judge for themselves the "qualifications" revealed in the stories of recovered addicts awakens the notion that at last there might be hope. When we find

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members of N.A. volunteering to give away the message of
cleanliness in order to keep what they have, we lose the question
of our fear of their motivation.

We of Narcotics Anonymous are currently trying to bring about
more communication, understanding, respect, and cooperation
between Narcotics Anonymous and any professional person who works
with drug addicts - so that more and more addicts may recover.
In the program of Narcotics Anonymous we make use of things that
have worked for those who have gone before us in the program; the
twelve steps, the principles and the many positive tools that help
us learn how to live and make lasting recovery possible. With
local groups in many communities, we are part of an informal
international fellowship with members in foreign countries. We
have but one primary purpose: to stay clean ourselves and to
help others who may turn to us for help in achieving this goal.
We are united by our common problem, drugs. Meeting and talking
and helping other addicts together, we are somehow, able to
stay clean and to lose the compulsion to use, once a dominant
force in our lives. We are grateful also to see new people
coming to meetings from the streets. There is nothing that
compares to a new person freshly talking about the pain and the
endless hustle that goes on out there. As a result, Narcotics
Anonymous has had more than twenty-five years of trial-and-error
experience, face-to-face, with literally hundreds of thousands of
drug addicts. This mass of intensive firsthand experience with all
kinds of problem drug users, in all phases of illness and recovery,
is unparalleled as far as we know. N.A. is glad to share it
freely with any professional person...or any addict who wants it.

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Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women for whom drugs in one form or another had become a major problem. They had become so physically, mentally, and spiritually ill that they as a result of the illness of addiction were considered as hopeless. As you and I did they had relinquished all hope of ever becoming a normal, active, productive part of the whole of man kind. We had all through excessive and unceasing use of drugs become crazed, depressed and terrified people, who are ill with the addiction. The growing fellowship of N.A. supports us in our efforts to recovery and gives us new friends who understand as only those who have been there can.

Our message of recovery is based on our own experience. Before coming to the program, we exhausted ourselves trying to use successfully or trying to find out what was wrong with us. After coming to the Narcotics Anonymous fellowship, we find ourselves among a very special bunch of people. At first its hard to realize that they've had it as bad as we have. In time we discover that almost all have had it worse than we have in some way. Many were a great deal worse off than we were. Then we find hope. If the Narcotics Anonymous program worked for them, it might work for us. Then we began to ask questions and listen a little more closely to the answers. After all there's a chance we can get a little relief. We do not think we are the only people who have the answer to problem drug using. We know that the N.A. program works for us, and we have seen it work for every newcomer, almost without exception, who honestly and sincerely wanted to quit using drugs. The main point is this: These people are drug dependent people like yourself yet they are clean and sober for months or years. If you can watch them and listen to them openly and realize that these people--as crazy and

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confused and helpless as yourself before they got to N.A. -- We have found a way to live and be happy without drugs. We can say if you are an addict to whatever kind or kinds of drugs and have had enough and desire to stop using there is hope and help in our meetings and fellowship.

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In all honesty the most we can hope to do for the newcomer is to share our experience, strength and hope. We can also stand ready to help when asked. If we go beyond this we risk becoming enablers and most of us can remember going limp as long as we could get someone else to take care of us. We don't want the help we can offer to rob the new person of that essential ingredient of living which setting your house in order can bring. We addicts have no choice but to help one another. In helping others our own recovery is assured. We don't criticize them better, we love them better. As several great men have pointed out, there is more to it than simple love. We are really talking about survival in a world where we have ceased to be functioning members of society. This program has given me a belief in a loving God that works through people and loves and heals the unbearable and unlovable, as I was when I came here. It can cause great harm to confuse issues and present complex thoughts to addicts seeking help. Never should we be dishonest and claim to have all the answers but we can share our experience and the things that worked for us. N.A. offers answers we can use, answers that have worked for others with our experience.

We don't want to settle for the limitations of the past. We want to examine and re-examine all our old notions and constantly improve on them or replace them with new. The anonymous programs have stumbled onto a way to reawaken the force for life within us and

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clear away all that might stand in our way. We in N.A. are men and women who have discovered and admitted that we cannot control drugs. We have learned that we must live without them if we are to avoid disaster for ourselves and those close to us.

The consequences of our addictive using (and thinking) have also varied. Some of our members had literally become derelicts before turning to N.A. for help. They had lost family, possessions, and self-respect. They had lived on skid row in many cities. They had committed many grave offenses---against society, their families, their employers and themselves. Others among us have never been jailed or hospitalized. Nor have they lost jobs through drug using. But even these men and women finally came to the point where they realized that drugs were interfering with normal living. When they discovered that they could not seem to live without drugs, they, too, sought to help themselves through N.A., rather than prolong their irresponsible using. The program works a revolution in our hearts and it is as if we become new people. The steps and continual daily abstinence give us daily reprieves from our self-imposed life sentences and we become free to move about without compulsion and guilt.

We are not reformers and we are not allied with any group, cause, or religious denominations. We have no wish to clean up the world. We do not recruit members. We avoid imposing our viewpoint of problem drug using on others, unless we are asked to do so.

We, of course, realize that the program is truly spiritual in essence and cannot ever be reduced to words however inspired.

N.A. does not conduct any kind of religious service. We are not affiliated with any organizations even detox units or recovery houses. We do cooperate with them to the best of our abilities. We are a program of attraction, not promotion so we do not recruit

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newcomers. We do not engage in or fund any type of research. N.A. does not provide any kind of professional social services or counseling. This is a program of anonymity so we do not keep any form of records on our members.

Communication is a very important part of our program. Without it we would not have the chance to share ideas and new aspects of the program with each other. What one group or area learns can and should be shared with other areas, this is how the program of N.A. has grown and spread over the past 25 years. We need each other.

Attending meetings creates a certain atmosphere of empathic and universal feelings which all addicts have in common. In this atmosphere of recovery, we found we were very much at home and we were very much at home and we were able to start in a new way of life with these people who called themselves addicts. The unconditional love we find at meetings makes it possible to relax and review our assumptions about ourselves and reality. Working the steps will give us a relationship with a power greater than ourselves, correct old defects, right old wrongs and lead us to help others. As we begin the process of change by honestly listening to the stories of people we meet in an N.A. meeting or in private fellowship, we will want to try out some of the solutions that have worked for others. Maybe this solution is part of our solution. Trying to be all things to all people, we have often forgotten what we really think and feel. As we begin to come to, the layers of phoniness will peel off like the skin of an onion. When the layers are gone, our real selves will remain.

The message of recovery from drug addiction is carried in the hearts and minds of recovering addicts in the program of Narcotics Anonymous.

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As we attend meetings and hear the experience, strength, and hope of others we will come to notice that we are not the only ones with problems. We will eventually hear some one who flat out makes us feel lucky by comparison. We will probably notice that we compare more and more favorably with where we are at when we came in. We have all tried many ways to overcome our addictions, and sometimes a temporary recovery was possible, but always it was followed by an even deeper involvement with addiction than before. This program offers hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless, and all you have to bring with you is the desire to stop using and the willingness to put into use the steps of the program. Come to meetings and listen with an open mind, and you will get the message of hope that we offer. Let these new ideas flow over you. Ask questions. The principles of living which are incorporated in the 12 steps may seem strange to you, but they work. This program works for those willing to work it. We have found that trying to help another addict-in our unique and often effective way is good for us whether or not the addict we try to help uses what we have to offer. For this reason, N.A. groups attempt to concentrate primarily on this person-to-person service, without getting involved in any extraneous enterprise no matter how worth while.

N. A. began when addicts sought help. The program endured through a prolonged period of development during which a broad foundation was laid down for a program based on complete abstinence from all drugs. In the sixties and seventies addiction reached epidemic proportions and touched the total worldwide population. Survivors began to appear in meetings. These meetings grew and eventually took charge of their own affairs. The need for definitive text increased. The broad scope of addiction and the diluting effect members seeking

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spiritual growth in AA made it difficult to accumulate the unity of purpose necessary to formulate a single book accurately describing the course of recovery experienced by N.A. members in general and in particular. Indeed it was difficult to find many who claimed N.A. as their primary source of their recovery. In the time however the need grew as the numbers of N.A. meetings and members increased. The problems they faced in achieving ongoing recovery generated this need. Swarms of newcomers forced many N.A.'s to address themselves to this need by combining efforts and sharing the common experience of recovery in N.A. There is proof. They can smile. Their eyes are clear. They seem to care for each other. They will probably introduce themselves to you and try to make you feel welcome.

We feel loved. More and more we feel we would rather be with people when we are getting negative than by ourselves because good comes from being with others; loneliness and negativity fall by the wayside. Something memorable, precious, and beneficial stems from clean togetherness. A security of being real and having real people who really care and show it when we believe in who and what we are; brothers and sisters on the road to recovery from the gripping disease of addiction. We recover together.

The only requirement to be a member of Narcotics Anonymous is a desire to stop using. We don't have to be clean when we get here, but after the first meeting we suggest that you keep coming back and come to the meetings clean and sober. We don't have to wait for an overdose, or a jail sentence to get help from N.A., nor is drug addiction a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery. It is possible to arrest the need to use drugs with the help of the 12 step program of N.A. and the fellowship of recovering addicts in N.A.

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We wish we could reach out to whoever reads this and lay our lives and hearts on the line to reach you and show you what this program and the spirit of N.A. has done for us. But we can say if you are an addict to whatever kind or kinds of drugs and have had enough and desire to stop using there is hope and help in our meetings and fellowship. It is not easy but it works.

Within our membership may be found men and women of varying age and many different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Some of us used many years before coming to appreciate that drugs made our lives become unmanageable. In other words if you think you might have a drug problem, the likelihood is that you do, and our program might have something very special to offer you. The nature of our disease makes us abnormally open to rationalizing and justifying our addiction instead of dealing with the facts. We become N.A. members when we say we are. It is all dependent on our sincere desire for recovery. We want desperately for the place where we addicts are heading in our recovery to be a safe place for those to come.

Anyone may join us regardless of age, race, color, creed, religion or lack of religion. We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem, and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We do have one must that applies to everyone at our meeting: No drugs or outfits on your person. This is for the protection of our fellowship and our group. N. A. costs the addict nothing; N.A. costs you nothing, and N.A. costs taxpayers nothing.

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Each N.A. group is entirely self-supporting by passing the hat to pay.

In a sense the program is a way for addicts to find the higher power that traditional religions have pointed to. The difficulty here is that we can quickly fall prey to the notion that we were not sick but merely uninformed. If we stop doing the things that began our recovery we are in definite danger of losing that recovery. If we follow a traditional path to the higher power we must not let it interfere with the process of our recovery. In the days before N.A. began to serve the needs of the growing numbers of addicts in our population spontaneous recovery through religion was rare and quick to fade. It now appears simple to realize that the recovered addicts to keep from developing the characteristic feeling of difference that sets us off from others. Surely we have many things to learn in this and many other areas but this knowledge of our inadequacy only strengthens our need for a method of recovery that worked. Claim of a spiritual awakening is worthless if the life of the individual is not changed for the better. We have no shortage of tendencies that would swell our view of ourselves beyond useful proportions.

In first entering the program some noticed a strong spiritual glow amongst the members. Then we could see and feel that a higher power was at work in N.A. After having a few months in the program we see how the spiritual need for a higher power keeps us clean.

Our program is in fact a way of life. We learn the value of principles such as humility, surrender, and service, however, the idea that you have to do it alone is a very old one. Fortunately many pressing problems can wait. It will help things go smoother when we find sponsors to confide in and let them help us. Most of us would most of us would have been better off turning our lives over to our

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garbage man. It is said that God will never give us more than we can handle a day at a time. He will do for us the things we cannot do for ourselves. Our willingness can open many doors. Some problems can be prevented by a timely phone call or helping a new person get to enough different meetings to realize we offer a way of life in which the total person can feel free to reach for some of the answers to many of their living problems. Certainly if a member asks for help in an area that they can't handle themselves we want to take advantage of the opportunity to help them. In this way we help ourselves to become useful to others. Learning the art of helping others when it is appropriate without creating resentments is a marvelous benefit of the program. We cannot set definite rules in this area without overstepping our bounds as fellow recovering addicts.

We of Narcotics Anonymous don't promise to have all the answers but we've found that our lives steadily improved if we don't use and learn to maintain our spiritual condition. In time we run into an addict seeking help and discover ourselves really able to respond to their needs. We are giving others what we have found. The truth is the more we give in this way, the more we have to offer. Our own needs are met when we learn to live for others. Through practicing our honesty, openmindedness and willingness to try, we develop humility, tolerance and patience. We are able to love the unlovable and discover self-acceptance. We are not as likely to create problems in our living. We finally realize we have a choice in the matter of our lives.

The 12 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, our new friends and our sponsors help us deal with these feelings. In N.A. our joys are multiplied by sharing our good days with our fellows, and our sorrows are lessened when we share bad days. For the first time in our lives we don't have to experience anything alone. Not only do we have the

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group but, hopefully, as time progresses we will develop a relationship with a higher power (as we understand it) that will always be with us.

We learn to experience feelings (e.g. anger, joy, sexual desire, fear) and realize that the feelings themselves can do us no harm unless we act on them. We learn to call someone if we have a feeling we cannot handle, and by sharing that feeling with a friend we learn to work through it. Chances are that our friend has had a similar experience and can relate what worked for us.

By close work with a sponsor we can utilize the 12 Steps of the program as a guide to dealing with situations we have not dealt well with in the past. Sponsorship is a give and take partnership, with bot gaining strength from the relationship. It was suggested that we look for a sponsor as soon as we became acquainted with the members in our area. We look for someone who has been down a path similar to ours, understands where we are coming from and has learned to cope with these same types of situations. We who are recovering must share with with others what we have in order to maintain our progress in the N.A. program and our ability to function without drugs. Being asked to sponsor a new member is a privilege, so don't hesitate to ask a person with whom you can identify. Sponsorship is a rewarding experience for both, and we are all here to help and to be helped. Get phone numbers and use them. Ask questions about the program and get acquainted with the people.

Our effort is not concerned with reducing recovery to a formula, but in sharing the truths we have found in recovery with others, N.A. is a challenge and it is one that everyone should take because it is life, so let us live to be more than a symbol.

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We suffered from a cunning, baffling and powerful disease called addiction and in order to live, we had to stay clean of all mind-altering drugs and work a program of recovery outlined in the 12 Steps. We went to meetings within institutional facilities, or anywhere we are asked. We furnish N.A. guest speakers for interested organizations, and cooperate with writers and communications media desiring information. Because N.A. meetings are held every day and night of the week in some areas, N.A. groups offer continuing supportive contact to help the addict maintain recovery. In addition to offering this time to the addict, N. A. offices and groups can make available a wide variety of N.A. publications. By far the best way to refer an addict to N.A. is to take him or her to an N.A. Meeting. We establish direct telephone contact between the addict and N.A. Professionals can begin to make use of N.A. services by getting to know several N.A. members personally and by attending open N.A. meetings.

Many books have been written about the nature of addiction. This book primarily concerns itself with the nature of recovery. If you are an addict and have found this book, please give yourself a break and read it. This is our book.

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