

FRONTLINE

Narcotics Anonymous Western Queens Area

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The First NA Meetings in New York

This article is the first in a series. In is an attempt to capture the truly fascinating, biographical, spirited and colorful stories of men and women within a vanishing world before it is too late. I want to highlight the historical importance of the beginnings of service work in NA, so that newcomers can see themselves inside efforts to carry the message and that members who can remember what a big deal it was to get clean back then, help inspire others to do service with their stories. "That Others May Find The Freedom of Recovery We Have Found" (1981). Editor

Awareness Group, Jackson Heights 1981

My name is Terry R. and I'm an addict. I have 35 years clean. A lot of the sharing at the early meetings was identification with stories - doing the right thing for the right reasons. A lot of us were gung-ho

to start meetings and we showed up anywhere to help start NA meetings and we went wherever we had to go.

In 1981, John Lindsay was the mayor back then. There was a lot of cocaine. Back then if you were strung out on heroin you had nowhere to go but the methadone clinic. Part of the message was not sitting around and doing nothing once you go clean. This was our thing. People were excited about recovery back then. This was something new. That we could stop using and that people didn't have to be tolerated in AA. There was angel dust back then. We started to realize that it was about the disease concept not what you used.

Addicts would come into the meeting and the trusted servants were taking them home and they were kicking on our couches. We didn't have any drug detoxes - all we had were alcohol detoxes.

(continued on page 3)

Holiday Helpings!

More Meetings Please!

The Basic Text cautions that "placing unrealistic expectations on ourselves or others" is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to my recovery. As a newcomer, the pressures I put on myself or others—especially on holidays showed up for me with certain attitudes in behaviors that were dangerous to my recovery. I masked my shame with ego and image that made me think I had to make amends to my family and loved ones with only months clean. There was the lack of gratitude, and self-destructive behavior I slipped into when I began to obsess about money—what I planned to get or didn't have. There was the fear,

(continued on page 8)

Our 9th Tradition

“NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve”
Anonymous

When I got clean, I never heard of the 12 Steps or the 12 Traditions. I would listen as the Steps and Traditions were read at each meeting. Some of the Traditions were easier to understand, like we are fully self-supporting, however I really did not understand the implication or the meaning of Tradition 9.

Over the years through doing service, I have come to a better understanding of all our traditions. I would like to share some of what I have learned about tradition nine with you.

When we ask ourselves, “Who is the ‘we’ that creates the service board or committee? The answer is “the Group (as such) or Groups of NA creates the service board or committee”.

So the NA Groups in New York at some point joined together to form an area. Why did they do that? There are several good reasons to form an area. One is so that the groups in a particular area can communicate with each other. Another reason to form an area is to be more efficient with our finances by not duplicating services. It is more prudent to consolidate our monies and pay only one time for things such as literature for a subcommittee like P.I. or H&I.

By the way, all our subcommittees were created by the group. Now this may sound a little radical or come as a surprise to some, but it is up to the groups of each area to decide which subcommittees they want to have. It is also up to the groups of each area to support these subcommittees they form with finances (money) and trusted servants (people who will provide the needed service).

Because of our Fourth Tradition which states each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole, it is up to each group to decide which service board or committee they want to participate in or with. This group can help a group that has specific needs that another group does not have.

Some examples are the need for Outreach Subcommittees to bridge the distance and isolation between a group itself, the area and other groups. There are people who attend groups who are disabled, cannot hear, speak, or see. Additional Needs Subcommittees to address the needs of medically disabled, aging and senior addicts who are unaware of NA accessibility. People who attend our groups who do not speak or read English may need literature translations. Newcomers in facilities who need Orientation Workshops about NA meetings. The Ninth Tradition is the basis on which groups can look directly to its members to participate in subcommittees or ask the members of the subcommittee to perform service tasks in behalf of the groups that direct them. Tradition Nine also works with Tradition Four so that groups make motions to the service board to direct the use of funds a group has contributed.

When a self-willed person says our group is autonomous and can do whatever we want because no one can tell us what to do, this can become a problem and affect NA as a whole. When one group goes off on its own and ignores the other groups around them, they are not participating ways that show in goodwill or that attract other members. It is important that



each decision a group and subcommittee makes inform, include and reach out to other members and groups in the very structure they created.

Our Fellowship has grown to become very large. As a result, there is a great deal of controversy about how we can continue to communicate and work together for the addict who still suffers.

One thing I know for sure. Putting comments about people who disagree with your view on social media or speaking against another member of our Fellowship who is working with their group to help the addicts who still suffers violates our First, Second and Tenth Tradition. We need to attract and encourage members on the group level to support and participate in the service boards and committees we create in order for our Fellowship to survive and evolve with the creative efforts of newer members. Applying traditions does not mean continuing to do things in a “tradition” of how things were always done. Recovery is an active change in our ideas and attitudes. We no longer have to argue our point of view. By encouraging group members and newcomers to help suffering addicts by supporting our subcommittees and service boards, we ensure that Narcotics Anonymous itself survives.

My very first exposure to NA meetings began after I had a year and a half clean in AA and went to Florida to celebrate my aunt's birthday. It was 1979 and when Maureen asked me if I wanted to go to an NA meeting, I asked her, "what's that?"

I wasn't sure what to expect. I remember that first meeting was in a dark room in a store front. It had the shades, the signs with slogans and the coffee. I was asked to share my story at this meeting. I knew that I was going back to New York soon as everyone kept telling me that I'd have to go back and start NA meetings there.

I wasn't sure I could walk and chew gum at the same time. But when I got back there I continued to go to AA until at one particular meeting some old guy got up and starting ranting about how we addicts were taking over their meetings—that we didn't belong.

The Church of the Blessed Sacrament was right across the street from my house. I went to talk to the priest and from that point, the first NA meeting in New York was started called Awareness.

Although in there is a widespread belief that the Rockefeller Laws delayed the start of NA in New York, it's really just mythology. The fact is that addicts knew nothing about Narcotics Anonymous in New York. Addicts by and large accepted the status quo and went to A.A.

At those first meetings at Awareness, on at 8 o'clock on Tuesday nights, there were about 13 regulars who came. One guy was Kevin Fogarty, a big red-headed iron worker who I used with my whole life. My friend Keven worked at the methadone program.

He was going back to work as an iron worker and they needed a recovering addict to work there as an alcohol counselor. There was a detox program for heroin to get off drugs but it was hard of stay off and the urines would come back with cocaine, alcohol and so it was always suggested that methadone maintenance be the cure for addiction.

Tony Daddio was a stocky guy who looked like a New York gangster, but funny and personable. I remember him leaning on the wall in the back of the room, according to his lingo, "strung out like research monkeys". Another one of the regulars, Frankie Smith was a magnet for girls. Rail thin, with black hair, he wore a motorcycle jacket and came to the meeting with a 45 caliber pistol stuck in the belt. He was a New York fireman. Rosy B. a good looking blonde girl, outspoken, personable came down with the crew from the Bronx to support the meeting.

There was a square table in the front where the chairperson and speaker would sit and round tables with chairs at them. There was no funding for drug detoxes. There was an alcohol commission. The grants were government funded and they didn't want to take drug addicts period.

When we first started I wrote to California for a starter kit and we used the same format that we had today. We started copying our own literature at the copy place cause there was no place in New York to buy literature. I kept requesting starter kits and it became increasing difficult to get literature.

Finally I wrote a letter saying "it would be easier to get an ounce



of pure heroin from my old connection than to get literature from you fucking people and if you don't like it we can talk about it in the parking lot at the World Convention in Miami."

In Loving Service, Terry R.

I was home and I got a phone call from the manager of the World Services Office (WSO) Jimmy Kinnon- In his call to me he said that "We know NA is going to grow and flourish and we've just sent you \$500 worth of NA literature." And that started my relationship with Jimmy Kinnon. And before we paid off that literature completely, we were sent another \$500 worth of literature.

I had heard that another NA meeting had cropped up in the Bronx. The Bronx NA meeting was coincidentally in a church called also the Blessed Sacrament in the East Chester section of the Bronx at 1141 Taylor Avenue. A bunch of us from the Awareness meeting went up there in the car and the meetings began to support each other .

The word started going around in AA meetings that there were NA meetings, methadone clinics and counseling people were curious. People wanted to get clean and were showing up strictly through word of mouth, like Mary. Mary D was an early member who had a lot of charisma and people were drawn to her. She helped with

(continued page 6)



Highlights from the USSCNA Conference III,
Greensboro, NC Oct. 3-4, 2014

"Let every group's conscience be heard"

PI Subcommittee made available to groups and members drafts of 18 **Instructional videos**, two examples re: The Flatlining of NA Services Amid the Rise of Heroin Addiction and a resource for Area Service Committees showing them how to Build Websites – posted on the Forum Page of usscna.org

H&I Subcommittee reported – How to start meetings in prison is a national problem. "Working the Steps with Inmates" initiative in Kentucky, Oregon and Cleveland, supported with free literature provided from a USSCNA homegroup in San Jose, California.

Additional Needs Subcommittee emphasized the growing national population of senior addicts sent to treatment centers who need awareness of NA accessibility. Also discussed was how signers for the deaf can be made available at meetings.

Outreach Subcommittee outlined process for back and forth communication to registered groups and to a growing database of emails submitted by individuals and gsr's who expressed interest in learning more about the USSCNA. A group of proactive members shared their experienced responding to requests for USSCNA presentations across the North East. **Look for an upcoming tab on how to request or do presentations on the home page of the usscna.org website.** A handout is available from the Outreach Subcommittee as a reference guide to do presentations. A conference call number for Presentations will be added to the call schedule.

Top 4 priorities expressed by the Body during the Vision Panel: **a)** Put out FAQ's page to address controversial questions about USSCNA, **b)** Put out a summary page of specific examples of USSCNA service to groups, **c)** start doing targeted subcommittee reach out to groups and areas, **d)** coordinate with other national service forums

Issue topics developed during small group session: **a)** create, compile and analyze survey data from presentations, **b)** conscience fellowship for list of specific plans for sub-committees, **c)** create a clarity statement about what the USSCNA is and what it is not, to promote more positive visibility. **d)** increase number of cities presenting bids for 2016 conference.



Holiday Helpings! More Meetings Please!

Continued from page one

resentment and pain that I experienced when dealing with family members during those family gatherings as a newcomer. Feelings I didn't want to feel over the holidays could lead to relapse, if I didn't actively start to use the tools of the program.

During my first clean holidays, I made sure I spent time at the marathon meetings. I felt so much fear, anger and resentment that I needed to make a few of the meetings before I visited my family and especially after the visit. I was able to get out of my head and focus on people who were not using and who were sharing and in the solution.

When the next holidays came around, I learned that doing service at one of the marathon meetings itself gave me direction and reminded me of where I came from and that it will be worse if I picked up this time. Like the Basic Text suggests, "the feeling we get from helping others motivates us to do better in our own lives. We find that pain shared is pain lessened."

I also found that people, places and things like "active" holiday parties at work, using friends and families and old dealers phone numbers had solutions when I

reached out to people and asked for their experience.

I needed to give myself a time limit and an out to deal with using family and office parties with alcohol. I needed to keep a glass of seltzer or soda in my hand and all times and call my sponsor or another recovering addict and get to a meeting right after.

I needed to ask for help to delete those old numbers and to put a block on them.

Getting over holiday stumbling blocks reminds me that I need to stay aware to recognize when self-pity, isolation, apathy, complacency and cockiness spin me away from meetings and make using seem like a good idea. "The Fellowship, we need to keep ourselves surrounded by others who know us well." Meetings places us in regular contact with the very people who can best understand and help us in our recovery.



The First NA Meetings in New York

I would hand out meeting lists on the Bowery and a lot of times I got cursed out. Back then, members were taking on a lot of responsibilities by themselves.

The first H&I meeting was a St. John's hospital in far Rockaway. There was another detox in Long Island.

A woman Bonny started the first meeting in Rockville Center. Bonny was a Jewish women, heavy set, lots of tracks. She was the first member I recalled who passed away from the Virus. After the 13th World Convention Bonny was in the hospital and she couldn't make it and we had to put on the gown, booties, masks and we brought her speaker tapes from the convention. Bonny was just lying there and I said, "Fuck you Bonny" and I said, "Let's go to a hotel and fuck our brains out" and she started laughing.

At those first meetings we accepted everybody who first came into the rooms. People were not shut down from sharing if you were loaded, so people just babbled on and on and on. We were explained that people sharing who were high had no experience, strength and hope to share and it made sense to us. It was motioned at the business meeting in the Bronx. The vote failed because the voting members were on methadone and high on heroin. So the chairperson Henry Milland stood up and resigned and we all took our signs and left the meeting because was not Narcotics Anonymous. We walked out of that meeting in East Chester in the Bronx. Tony, Sal and Shari and Rosie started Back to Life meeting at 800 Morris Park.

Then there was group in Harlem that wanted to start a meeting. Jimmy Kinnon called he told me that they wanted a meeting in a facility called **The Enter House in East Harlem - 252 E. 112 Street.** And I helped started a meeting in that treatment center that was also open to addicts to come in off the streets.

At same time we started the two hour Helpline in my house 212-565-6206. The number first appeared on the meeting list. The Helpline became my phone number and since I call forwarding I could send to out to people during different nights and they were excited to that because they could wait for calls to come in. We would just talk to people about where the meetings were. We had parents and wives calling up and asking about meetings. We had a famous musician that called up who got clean and stayed clean. From my house, the Helpline moved to St. Marks. If no one could man the phones the answering machine would take them. All we cared about was having people available to answer people who called. We put Helpline stickers wherever we went until the phone company called and said we couldn't do that.

I remember getting a call from a guy named Matt who had just gotten out of a treatment center in Georgia and he called to ask if there was NA in New York. Matt was an Irish kid in his twenties; he was leery and desperate. He had a healthy fear of going back out and using. Matt was from Greenpoint and got strung out working for a drug company.

Father Terry Atridge was the head of the Brooklyn Diocese Substance Abuse program. Father Terry Atridge was a young guy in his 30's that cared about addicts, once he figured out what NA was and what we were trying to do. Short hair, parted to the side, he looked more like a college student back then and Irish priest. He in turn introduced me to Father A Hearn, who ran the Men's Shelter at Bleeker and Matt helped me to open the Bleeker Street Meeting. Father Valero from Queens referred us to Father A Hearn, he looked like a quiet marine drill sergeant. He opened the doors for the men's shelter.

Then another priest from the church on 48th and 8th Ave St. Malgese became the location of the Midtown Connection, in Hell's Kitchen. There were meetings popping up all over the place. Matt from Greenpoint, and Anna Brooklyn and started the Star Group (Start Talking About Recovery) 8128 83rd Street, Betrethe Reform Church, in



Brooklyn. Anna showed up with her husband who was from AA. Anna was in her thirties, a big, strong, loving and kind woman.

Our meeting there was in the basement next to the boiler. That was Brooklyn's first meeting. Meetings were just starting to jump off the same time. Clean and Serene, at St. Mark's parish Church was started at 82 street and 34th Avenue, in Jackson Heights, by this guy named Brian.

The first Step meeting in New York was started by a woman named Anna on Parsons Blvd and Union Turnpike by Anna and this girl Mary D. Other meetings were starting up in the Bronx too. In Manhattan, New Beginnings group started on 20th street between 2nd and 3rd Avenue s on the third floor in Cabrini hospital. The meeting taken over the space of a gay AA meeting that fell apart. A guy named Ira started the meeting and nobody notified the hospital that we were meeting they, we just took over the space of a meeting that had died. As soon as hospital found out we were meeting there they promptly threw us out. Many of us had very little practical experience with the steps much less the traditions. We were just excited to be clean and have a place to go to recover.

I guy I worked with named Larry Wolf walked off the methadone program and kicked in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. He met his girlfriend Teresa and Eddy and Merrill. I remember going up to a synagogue to the upper west side and speaking to a rabbi who told me my people don't have that problem and I said that's funny because I heard that they call Quaaludes Jewish aspirin. We didn't get that meeting space.

Continued on page 7

The First NA Meetings In New York

some of the first Area Service.

It was common to hear of people dying of overdoses who came to the meetings. It was as life or death thing.

We were strung out for such a long time that finally when we got the message that you can get clean and stay clean we wanted to give that message to everybody that you didn't have to stick needles in your arm. We chased our recovery. We had energy and we wanted to give that message to everybody. We went to these dances. We went to AA and NA in the beginning because we only had a few NA meetings. I made the realization that if I continued to go to AA I would be telling the newcomers that NA doesn't work and that I have to go somewhere else. That meant that we had to start more meetings. We would do caravans. One night we were in Brooklyn, the next night we were in the Bronx, then we were in Queens and then Staten Island. John Curley came around the time of the World Convention in New York. We had 10 meetings when we put the bid in. Two months after the World convention we had 50 meetings and the message was spreading like wildfire! In the beginning we had this woman Anna who came from AA with her husband Joe. Anna, Mary started the first Step Meeting which was Horizon which on Union Turnpike and Main Street. We read out of the book and then we would discuss the step. There would be about 25 or 30 people and the chair would call on them from the floor.

A big part of getting people clean we that we did 12 step calls. We would phone forward the helpline number

and two people would go pick someone up and take them to the meeting. It is like a lost art that was dropped because the treatment centers pick people up and send them to treatment. Detoxes wouldn't take drug addicts – very few. They had a lot of alcohol detoxes because they funded by the National Council on Alcoholism. The only way we would get someone into detox was to take them in the alley, give them a pint of booze in the alley so they would have alcohol on their breath and half the time they wouldn't take them. Then we'd have a sick, drunk drug addict on our hands and we'd have to take them back home and they would wind up going to cop. It was a money way, not a loving way, because if they took in drug addicts and they found out they might lose their funding. There was one hospital in Long Island that would take drug addicts. You either kicked in the psyche ward or you kicked on somebody's couch. I remember this one guy Gary going to his house and going to pick him up and he ran out to the garage and his mother said, "Oh he likes to play drums". I said to myself, "Oh sure". And I went out to the back of the garage and he was drinking a bottle. I kicked over his bed and there were bunch of bottles under there. I took him up to detox and he started acting out and after I started choking him and he calmed down he went up to detox.

This ends the first part of this segment. The upcoming issues of Frontline will contain continuations of this article as well as articles from members who highlight the historical inspiration of service work, freely given.





Suggested Topic List for Upcoming Issues

- Young Addicts —Roxies, Percocet's, Suboxone - Progression Accelerated
- Articles Discussing Our Traditions, Sponsorship, Area Service
- Confronting My Fears With Relapse—Dr.s and Honesty
- Still Doing Service After Twenty Years
- Taking Care of Parents in Recovery - A Gift of Amends
- Sexting between Newcomers: Harmless Outlet or Relapse Trigger?
- Selling Pills in Our Meetings: A Group Concern or a Fellowship Epidemic?
- Difference between Abstinence , Clean Time & Recovery
- X-Rated Sharing on the Floor—Honesty or Exhibitionism?
- Group Histories and Anniversaries
- How I Chose My Sponsor
- Commitment of the Heart or Commitments of the Ego
- Side Out- Rotate: A Principle that Protects Against Service Cliques

Next Deadline for article submission is December 15h,

2014

You can find Frontline on

<http://www.westernqueensna.org/>

To submit articles or schedule an interview
contact Wilvena G.

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Submission Guidelines
Send in your experience in recovery, your views on NA matters. The opinions expressed herein are not to be attributed to NA as a whole, nor does the publication of any article imply endorsement by Narcotics

Anonymous. All manuscripts are subject to a review and editing process. We look for tone that reflects a spirit of unity and enthusiasm for recovery .

Edits are made in keeping with NA's understanding of the Twelve Steps, Traditions and Concepts, and language such as "clean" "recovery" and "addict" .

Author's first names and last initial are printed , unless the author submits as "Anonymous" . 1000 word maximum.