

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIETY OF RECOVERING DRUG ADDICTS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Prepared by: World Services for Narcotics Anonymous

Background

Narcotics Anonymous is an international, community-based association of recovering drug addicts. Started in 1947, the NA movement is one of the world's oldest and largest of its type, with more than twenty-one thousand weekly meetings in seventy-seven countries. We will describe how NA services are organized at the local, national, the Asia Pacific Zone and international levels. We will talk about how Narcotics Anonymous cooperates with others concerned about drug abuse in their countries and communities, and in particular the Asia Pacific area. Finally, we will provide information on NA's membership, demographic profile and indicators of the success of Narcotics Anonymous.

Development

Narcotics Anonymous sprang from the Alcoholics Anonymous movement in the late 1940s, with meetings first sprouting up in the Los Angeles area of California, USA, in the early Fifties. For many years the NA society grew very slowly, spreading from Los Angeles to other major North American cities and Australia in the early 1970s. An assembly of local delegates was first established in 1978. In 1983 Narcotics Anonymous published a basic text book called Narcotics Anonymous, and growth rates have since skyrocketed. Other NA groups formed rapidly in Brazil, Colombia, Germany, India, the Irish Republic, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. In the three years following initial publication of NA's basic text book, the number of Narcotics Anonymous groups nearly tripled. This growth has been attributed to having NA literature available. This growth has been apparent in countries and communities where NA literature has been available in local languages, allowing for the message of NA to be adapted into a their local culture. Today, Narcotics Anonymous is fairly well established throughout much of Western Europe, the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, with newly formed groups and NA communities scattered through the Indian subcontinent, Africa, East Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

NA Development in the Asia Pacific Zone

The first Narcotics Anonymous meetings in the Asia Pacific were held in Australia in the late 1970s. The NA Fellowship has grown rapidly in this region, from more than 150 meetings per week in 8 countries in 1986, to well over 600 Narcotics Anonymous meetings per week in 15 countries in 1996. Today, NA is most established in Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, and the Philippines; smaller NA communities exist in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Nepal, Singapore, and Thailand. Local and national volunteer service committees, annual conventions, and national offices for basic services such as literature distribution and phone line services are becoming common place throughout the Asia Pacific Zone. For the purpose of providing services to NA worldwide, NA has divided up the world into specific geographic areas. We have 9 zones: Europe, South America, four zones within continental North America, Canada

and the Asia Pacific Zone. In 1992 the NA Asia Pacific Forum was formed as a loose alliance of NA communities in the zone. The 'forum' which is attended by representatives from NA communities within the defined zone, has held yearly meetings since then, the last being in KL, Malaysia (1996) with the next being scheduled in Manila, February 1997.

In 1998, the forum meeting will be held in India, and the forum hopes to host its first Zonal convention for local NA members. With the APF(Asia Pacific Forum) as a focal point for communication with others in the addictions field, Narcotics Anonymous is now easier to access than ever in the Asian Pacific. NA's two key growth challenges in this part of the world are to eliminate the perceived "ownership" of NA by Western countries, and to translate the NA program into culturally acceptable terminology without compromising NA's core principles. NA communities that are currently included within this zone are as follows.

The more established communities are Australia, New Zealand ,Hawaii, Guam, Philippines and Japan. All these communities either have a good supply of NA literature available or translated NA literature. Communities that have been functioning for some time and have translation efforts currently in progress are Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, some new Indian community dialects, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese.

Public Relations

NA speakers from the Asia Pacific Zone, (depending on human resources available within certain NA communities), should be available for government and community groups as well as addiction treatment client meetings and prison groups. Some NA meetings are open for visits from client groups, individual clients, or those referred by the judicial/corrections system. This needs to be negotiated with each NA community due to various custom and treatment/correctional facility requirements in certain countries. NA seeks to cultivate working relations with national governments, ASEAN and other intergovernmental agencies. NGO's are a good example of one of NA's Traditions i.e. "cooperation without affiliation."

Over the years NA has enjoyed a productive relationship with various NGO events held in the Asia Pacific Zone. From the late 1980's to this year, we have participated in IFNGO's in Hong Kong twice, Singapore, Philippines, and now this conference in Jakarta Indonesia, also the World Federation of Therapeutic Communities Conference in KL Malaysia and the Demand Reduction Conference (UNDCP) Bangkok, Thailand. The attendance at these events have proved most fruitful to NA's growth in the Asia Pacific. As more professionals become more accustomed with the society of NA, NA has become more accepted in the Asia Pacific, casting off the old image it had i.e. being a Western only self help movement.

NA Membership in Brief

NA's earliest self-titled pamphlet, known among members as "the White Booklet," describes Narcotics Anonymous as "a nonprofit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. . . recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean." Membership is open to any drug addict, regardless of the particular drug or combination of drugs used. There are no social, religious, economic, racial, ethnic, national, gender, or class-status membership

restrictions. Narcotics Anonymous membership is completely voluntary; no membership rolls or attendance records are kept, either for NA or anyone else. Members live in the community and attend meetings on their own time. There are no dues or fees for membership; most members regularly contribute small sums to help cover expenses at group meetings, but contributions are not mandatory.

The NA Program

The core of the Narcotics Anonymous recovery program is 12 main principles known as the Twelve Steps, adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous. These "steps" include admitting there is a problem, seeking help, self-appraisal, confidential self-disclosure, making amends where harm has been done, and working with other drug addicts who want to recover. Narcotics Anonymous itself is non religious and encourages each member to cultivate an individual understanding, religious or not, of this "spiritual awakening."

Narcotics Anonymous believes that one of the keys to its success is the therapeutic value of addicts working with other addicts. 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. Narcotics Anonymous has no professional therapists, no residential facilities, and no clinics. NA provides no vocational, legal, financial, psychiatric, or medical services. The closest thing to an "NA counselor" is the sponsor, an experienced member who gives informal assistance to a newer member. The primary service provided by Narcotics Anonymous is the NA group meeting. Each group runs itself on the basis of principles common to the entire organization, principles laid out in the movement's literature.

NA Service Organization

The basic unit of the Narcotics Anonymous organization is the NA group. In a country where Narcotics Anonymous is a relatively new phenomenon, the NA group is the only level of organization e.g., Thailand, Nepal Hong Kong. In a country where a number of Narcotics Anonymous groups have had the chance to develop and stabilize, groups will have elected delegates to form a local service committee e.g., Malaysia, Philippines etc. A number of services are usually offered by these area committees, among them:

- distribution of Narcotics Anonymous literature
- telephone information services
- public information presentations for treatment/prison staff, community organizations, government agencies
- panel presentations to acquaint treatment or correctional facility residents with the NA program; and meeting directories for individual information and use in scheduling visits by client groups

The NA position of “No Opinion on Outside Issues” (NA Tradition No. 10)

In order to maintain its focus, Narcotics Anonymous has established a tradition of non endorsement and does not take positions as an organization on anything outside its own specific sphere of activity. Narcotics Anonymous does not express opinions, either pro or con, on civil, social, medical, legal, or religious issues, nor does it take any stands on secondary addiction-related issues such as criminality, law enforcement, drug legalization or penalties, prostitution, HIV infection, or free-needle and syringe

programs. Narcotics Anonymous is entirely self-supporting and accepts no financial contributions from non-members. In a similar vein, it is generally understood that groups and service committees are run by members, for members.

NA will neither endorse nor oppose any other organization's philosophy or methodology. Narcotics Anonymous believes its sole competence is in providing a platform upon which drug addicts can share their recovery with one another. This is certainly not to say that Narcotics Anonymous believes there aren't any other "good" or "worthy" organizations. However, to remain free of the distraction of controversy, NA focuses all its energy on its particular area of competence, leaving others to fulfill their own goals.

Cooperating with Narcotics Anonymous

Although, as previously stated, certain traditions do guide NA's relations with other organizations, Narcotics Anonymous welcomes the cooperation of those in government, the clergy, the helping professions, and private voluntary organizations. In turn, NA is happy to cooperate with others interested in Narcotics Anonymous by providing information, literature, and contact information about recovery through the NA Fellowship. NA's non-addict friends/professionals have been instrumental in starting Narcotics Anonymous in many countries and helping NA grow.

Religious Background

All religious backgrounds are represented among NA members. In a given national movement, the membership generally reflects the diversity or homogeneity of the background culture.

Rate of Growth

Because no attendance records are kept, it is impossible even to estimate what percentage of those who come to Narcotics Anonymous ultimately achieve long-term abstinence. The only sure indicator of the program's success is the rapid growth in the number of registered Narcotics Anonymous meetings in recent decades and the rapid spread of Narcotics Anonymous outside North America. In 1978, there were fewer than 200 registered groups in three countries. In 1983, more than a dozen countries had 2,966 meetings. In 1995, we knew of groups holding 21,541 weekly meetings in seventy-seven countries.

NA Membership Silhouette

Who will your client meet when she or he attends an NA meeting? Unfortunately, we cannot give you a detailed demographic profile on the NA membership in your country today. We do have some information, however, from an informal poll taken in 1989 of 5,000 Narcotics Anonymous members—a silhouette, if you will, rather than a profile:

Age

- 11% of our members are under 20
- 37% are between 20 and 30
- 48% are between 30 and 45
- 4% are over 45

Gender

64% of our members are male
36% are female

(Note: Varies greatly in Asia Pacific communities due to religious and cultural diversity)

Meeting attendance

50% of our members attend at least 4 meetings per week

Initial referral

47% of our members were introduced to Narcotics Anonymous through a treatment facility or while incarcerated
29% were introduced to NA through another member
24% were introduced by a community professional (doctors, attorneys, clergy, judges)

Challenges encountered between NA and some Treatment Agencies within the Asia Pacific Zone.

There are a few points where the local Narcotics Anonymous groups, may conflict with your treatment philosophy. Rather than evade these points, we prefer to state them in the open so that you can make informed decisions about referring clients to Narcotics Anonymous.

Disease concept: Narcotics Anonymous views addiction as a disease. We do not qualify our use of the term "disease" in any medical or specialized therapeutic sense, nor do we make any attempt to persuade others of the correctness of our view. The disease concept works well as an analogy by which our members can understand their condition: When treated, addiction can be "arrested" but not "cured." Untreated, addiction has effects similar to a disease.

Total abstinence: The experience of our members has been that total, continuous abstinence from all drugs has provided them with a reliable foundation for recovery and personal growth. However, abstinence is not in itself the sole goal of our members; more importantly, we seek a comprehensive change in attitude and lifestyle. "Relapse" is seen for some, as sometimes part of the overall addiction/ recovery process for many individuals. Relapsers are not "shamed" but are encouraged to pick up the pieces, learn from their experience, and move on. Narcotics Anonymous views alcohol as a drug, and we find the "drug of choice" designation irrelevant to our program since we focus on the overall concept of addiction itself, not any particular drug or drugs. The use of psychiatric medication and other medically indicated drugs prescribed by a physician and taken under medical supervision is not seen as compromising a person's "clean time" (our terminology for drug free).

Summary

Narcotics Anonymous does not claim to have all the answers for every drug addict in every community, nor do we believe that all other approaches to the problems associated with addiction are necessarily without merit. However, the members of 21,000 NA groups in 77 countries have been successfully applying the Twelve Step program to their own drug addiction since 1947 and are ready to offer their experience to other addicts seeking a drug-free outcome, recovery from the effects of addiction,

and a stable, productive lifestyle. Narcotics Anonymous has a long tradition of cooperating with professionals, government, and community organizations to address the needs of addicts world wide. Most local NA groups and service committees are prepared to welcome visitors and client groups, follow up on professional interventions, make presentations to residential clients or prison inmates. Our members cover a broad demographic range and we have a number of different types of meetings, so most clients will usually find something in NA in their local community they can make a connection with. We have identified a few points where the Narcotics Anonymous program may conflict with your treatment regimen so that you can make informed decisions when referring clients, but we hope these conflicts will be minor, few, and far between. Our primary message is that, together, Narcotics Anonymous and others in the local community concerned with drug addiction can help addicts find a new, more satisfying, more productive way to live.

World Service Office HQ

PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, California 91409 USA
Telephone (818) 773-9999
Fax (818) 700-0700
E-mail: wso@na.org
Website: www.na.org

WSO Europe

Rue de l'Été 48
B-1050 Brussels Belgium
Telephone +32.2.646.6012
Fax +32.2.649.9239

Narcotics Anonymous Asia Pacific Forum

PO Box 90397,
Honolulu, Hawaii 96835-0397 USA
Website: www.apf.com.au

Fellowship Service Office Inc

1st floor, 204 King St.
Newtown NSW 2042 Australia
Telephone +61.2.9565.1453
Fax +61.2.9519.7554