

Addiction recovery in Twelve Step Fellowships – Quality of life among members of the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship

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Narcotics Anonymous is a nonprofit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. They are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other to stay clean. There are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using. You don't have to be clean when you get here, but after your first meeting we suggest that you keep coming back and come clean. You don't have to wait for an overdose or jail sentence to get help from NA, nor is addiction a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery. It is possible to overcome the desire to use drugs with the help of the Twelve Step program of Narcotics Anonymous and the fellowship of recovering addicts.

Addiction is a disease that can happen to anyone. Some used drugs because they enjoyed them, while others used to suppress the feelings they already had. Still others suffered from physical or mental ailments and became addicted to the medication prescribed during their illnesses. Some joined the crowd using drugs a few times just to be cool and later found that they could not stop. Many tried to overcome addiction, and sometimes temporary relief was possible, but it was usually followed by an even deeper involvement than before.

Whatever the circumstances, it really doesn't matter. Addiction is a progressive disease such as diabetes. Addicts are allergic to drugs. Their ends are always the same: jails, institutions, or death. Their life has become unmanageable and they want to live without it being necessary to use drugs, and now they have found a way.

There are different Twelve Step Fellowships, such as: Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous. Here are the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous that addicts use on a daily basis to help overcome their disease.

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

This sounds like a big order, and they can't do it all at once. Addicts didn't become addicted in one day, so they need to remember—easy does it. There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat them in their recovery; this is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles. Three of these that are indispensable are honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. With these they are well on their way.

They feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. They feel that their way is practical, for one addict can best understand and help another addict. They believe that the sooner they face their problems within their society, in everyday living, just that much faster do they become acceptable, responsible, and productive members of that society.

The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that first drug. If you are like them you know that one is too many and a thousand never enough. They put great emphasis on this, for they know that when they use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, they release their addiction all over again. Thinking of alcohol as different from other drugs has caused a great many addicts to relapse. Before they came to NA, many of them viewed alcohol separately, but they cannot afford to be confused about this. Alcohol is a drug. They are people with the disease of addiction who must abstain from all drugs in order to recover.

Recovery doesn't stop with just being clean. As they abstain from all drugs (and, yes this means alcohol and marijuana, too) they come face-to-face with feelings that we they never coped with successfully. They even experience feelings they were not capable of having in the past. They must become willing to meet old and new feelings as they come. They learn to experience feelings and realize they can do them no harm unless they act on them.

Rather than acting on them, they call an NA member if they have feelings they cannot handle. By sharing, they learn to work through it. Chances are other members have had a similar experience and can relate what worked for them. They are remembered by the program that, an addict alone is in bad company.

The Twelve Steps, new friends, and sponsors all help them deal with these feelings. In NA, their joys are multiplied by sharing good days; their sorrows are lessened by sharing the bad. For the first time in their lives, they don't have to experience anything alone. Now that they have a group, they are able to develop a relationship with a Higher Power that can always be with them. They suggest that you look for a sponsor (a person with more experience in recovery – sharing his strength and hope with his sponsee) as soon as you become acquainted with the members in their area. Being asked to sponsor a new member is a privilege so its advised not to hesitate to ask someone.

Sponsorship is a rewarding experience for both the sponsor and the sponsee – its a “two way road”. All of the members are there to help and be helped. Those who are recovering must share with others what they have learned in order to maintain their growth in the NA program and their ability to function without drugs or other obsessive and compulsive situations.

This program offers hope. All people have to bring with them is the desire to stop using and the willingness to try this new way of life. “Come to meetings, listen with an open mind, ask questions, get phone numbers and use them. Stay clean just for today.” May we also remind you that this is an *anonymous* program and your anonymity will be held in the strictest of confidence. “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.”

Does this program really work? The fact that there are around 30 thousand meetings a week in 96 countries, the official website (www.na.org) was in June 2006 in average visited 6706 times a day and that more and more rehabilitation centers use the Twelve Step treatment model seem to prove that yes it really works. In my master degree thesis I have researched the quality of life among members of the Polish members of Narcotics Anonymous and compared

it with a socio-demographic parallel control group of non addicts. The results indicated that there were differences in certain areas of life, but there were no statistically significant differences in overall quality of life measured factors.

Key words: Addiction – Twelve Step Fellowships – Narcotics Anonymous – Quality of life