

## WHAT IS OUTREACH

Most dictionary definitions of “outreach” describe it as: to reach beyond, to surpass. In Narcotics Anonymous, we use the term to describe an array of services designed specifically to insure that any NA member, group, or meeting can participate in the NA service structure and receive services they so desire. The goals of outreach service are to assist groups in solving problems that may impede their growth or threaten their survival and to help groups overcome many kinds of isolation by encouraging increased knowledge, contact and exposure to NA as a whole and to the NA service structure. The fundamental approach in outreach efforts often described as support services for groups and service committees, is helping groups and committees to help themselves. In many ways, this really is reaching beyond or surpassing our normal or routine service efforts.

Outreach service is meant to complement rather than duplicate the activities of any existing service committee, board or the USSC. Many of our service committees, to be effective, must prioritize the nature and schedule for delivery of their services due to the limits imposed by available human and financial resources. Sometimes this results in a lack of basic communication and support to NA members and groups. Formalized outreach subcommittees appear around our fellowship because they provide a systematic approach for one group of addicts to help another by serving their basic needs.

The activities of existing outreach subcommittees vary widely, each one tailored to the needs of those it serves. There are, however, common themes and tasks shared by many who participate in outreach efforts. Describing what outreach subcommittees do may be the best way to define outreach. While none do all, most outreach subcommittees do perform some of the following functions:

- Provide a direct line-of-communication to isolated members and groups, in and out of institutions,
- Present or take part in activities designed to bring isolated members and groups together with each other and the NA community,
- Conduct workshops on group level service, provide orientation sessions for GSRs, and develop GSR information packets,
- Conduct outreach workshops at learning events,
- Facilitating, encouraging and improving GSR attendance at area meeting,
- Assisting groups in need of support and group trusted servants,

- Helping to register groups with service committees and the USSC,
- Compiling or advising in the compilation of meeting schedules,
- Developing or maintaining an informative map of service boundaries
- Encouraging members to be involved in NA Service,
- Helping members and groups to learn about ordering literature and receiving NA publications,
- Facilitation the development and availability of simplified service materials,
- Helping groups to provide for members with additional needs.

For discussion purposes, we can describe three general categories of outreach service; extended, community, and institutional.

### Extended Outreach

Extended outreach efforts focus on communication as a way to minimize the isolation created by geographical, language and cultural barriers. The main objective is to bring isolated members or groups together with other parts of NA. These services can include; facilitation correspondence, coordination of long distance travels to support groups, maintaining conduct information files, helping plan activities for those who could not otherwise come together, and collecting information for outreach newsletters.

### Community Outreach

Whether in an emerging NA community or an established urban setting, fellowship development seems to follow a very similar process. Often, alternating spurts of growth followed by plateaus characterized this development process. In many cities or communities where NA already exists, some type of service structures has been developed to meet local needs. In these situations, it is fairly common to find NA members or outreach subcommittees providing support services to the existing NA communities in countryside, suburban and/or metropolitan settings. The focus in this setting is on participation. Assisting groups in need of support, helping GSRs to attend area meetings, helping groups to become re-involved in the local service structure, and helping groups to register are the primary functions of community oriented outreach subcommittees.

### Institutional Outreach

Institutional outreach efforts, designed to allow groups in institutions to participate in the service structure, can include personal contact, correspondence, newsletters, and literature mailings. These services are directed at NA meetings that are not H&I panels, yet have been started in institutions, long-term facilities, prisons, state hospitals, military bases, and nursing homes. These meetings and groups spring up from a variety of sources.

Often, NA is not available at all until our hospital and institutions committees conduct a series of panel presentations. Sometime later, staff professionals, patients, or inmates start an NA meeting. Sometimes, meetings in an institutional setting result from one or more recovering addicts becoming incarcerated. Also, professionals who have learned about NA through our public information efforts start NA groups in various settings. Regardless of how they came to exist, these NA meetings can easily become isolated from other NA groups, and service committees. Sometimes the only link to NA from a group in one of these facilities is contact with an outreach subcommittee or registration with the World Service Office.

Some NA communities have used outreach services for many years, and some are just now considering the idea. To the struggling group or the isolated member, it is often outreach services that rekindle the hope and spirit of “Together We Can” as a theme for recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

Outreach subcommittees work to provide growth and unity by bringing a variety of groups or meetings into contact with the service structure, allowing new and existing elements of the fellowship to benefit from shared experience. Funding comes from the service committee to which they are responsible. In some places, outreach effort are a regional activity. Elsewhere, area subcommittees provide these services directly with a regional subcommittee serving as a forum or coordinating body. It is important to emphasize that the mission of outreach activities are to assist groups to become self-sustaining, and not to enforce a uniform understanding of traditions, foster dependency nor to simply start new groups. Successful outreach committees have learned to avoid creating an additional level of structure bureaucracy or barrier to the direct communication between new, emerging, or isolated groups and the rest of the fellowship and service structure.

At the 2012 United States Service Conference meeting, the USSC Outreach Subcommittee was created to provide a resource to outreach subcommittees in their efforts to develop and sustain NA groups and to encourage their involvement in NA service. USSC Outreach works closely with the United States Fellowship to assist in the formation of new outreach subcommittees, compile and distribute resource information, and coordinate an outreach network for communication. To register your outreach committee or receive outreach bulletins and resource information, please contact the USSC Outreach Subcommittee, c/o the USSC office, P.O Box 8378 Rockford, IL 61126.