

The Messenger

GROUP CONSCIENCE-ONE ADDICT'S EXPERIENCE

When I got clean, I barely understood the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous, and the Traditions were just something we read at the beginning of each meeting. Traditions didn't really apply to me in my personal recovery. I needed the groups and was grateful that the meetings were available, but I was busy trying to just not use and wasn't ready to see beyond my own predicament.

Then the pandemic hit.

Would meetings continue? Would we lose touch with each other? How would NA survive if we couldn't meet and hug and be a haven for people dying from this insidious disease?!

Well, here I sit on the other side of that fear- NA continued just fine, I stayed clean, and so did many other addicts. Addicts are resourceful, after all. Of course, we found a way to meet! We met in people's backyards. We met in churches that didn't adhere to the lockdown rules, and we met online! This happened in Boise, in Idaho, all over the country and all over the world. Even our subcommittees continued to meet in an online format. We were locked down, but we stayed connected, and we even managed to get business done! Our group conscience, our collective subconscious, worked through addicts all over the world to keep our fellowship going to bring us closer together.

One of the subcommittees I joined during this time was Public Relations (PR.) I sat in on meetings because I was participating in taking panels into the one facility that allowed us to bring in meetings throughout lockdown times. I would listen to the reports read by subcommittee members, and I heard that there was a need for a women's meeting at the jail. Something inside of me was inspired and I volunteered to revive the position for the ACJ Women's coordinator. I vaguely recall that the PR Chair and other experienced members warned me that there may not be much interest from our fellowship in volunteering at the facility, and I was encouraged to start slowly. They suggested to me that starting with one meeting per month might be the most practical thing to do, to prevent burnout from the approved volunteers-if I could find any. I waved away this sage advice from more experienced members, assuring them that I could make a difference and get the women's meetings going, and I trudged forward with a mission in my heart.

I attended every meeting I could get to, announcing the need for volunteers and talking to any female member who had the required amount of clean time, virtually begging them to complete the background applications. Some agreed to do so. Some did not! That surprised me, but I pushed onward. A few women expressed interest and willingness to volunteer, and a few women passed the background check and were approved; as soon as the jail resumed in person volunteer services, we started taking meetings into the facility with 3-4 women rotating monthly meetings.

It's been more than a year now, and of the 10 or so women who have completed background applications, only a total of 5 were approved to go into the facility. Of the 5 women who were approved and taking meetings into the facility, one moved away, two had other life circumstances which prevented them from attending on any kind of regular basis, which left two approved volunteers willing and able to bring meetings into the facility.

This wasn't a sustainable option. This wasn't what I personally wanted, and I struggled for a while with feelings of resentment and frustration paired with empathy and compassion for the residents at the jail, recalling my own time there just before I got clean, the lowest point in my life. Through continuing my step work, talking with my sponsor, and studying the 12 traditions, I have been able to go from disappointment to a level of acceptance and trust in the fellowship.

Although it was a painful lesson, I have a better understanding of group conscience through this service position. There were multiple ways in which my own higher power was showing me the group conscience of the fellowship-individual members either didn't have enough clean time or didn't have room in their schedules, or simply didn't want to participate in the panels at ACJ. The jail background application and difficult approval process, and then shortly after I became the coordinator for both the women's and men's side of the facility, ACJ shut down all meetings at the facility- again, we were not given a reason why.

I have been able to see that the group conscience of our fellowship in the TV Area is that meetings at the jail are not realistic right now. It's not practical for us to take meetings into ACJ, and if it's not practical, it's not spiritual. When my tunnel vision widened into a broader perspective, I came to a level of acceptance about this, and I realized that the residents at the jail can receive the NA message in other ways. We can continue to send NA literature into the jail, and since the jail is just a short-term holding facility, residents are either released to probation, where they have access to NA on the streets, or sent on to prison, where they have more access to in person meetings.

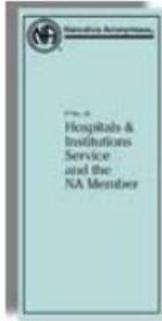
I used to think group conscience simply meant a vote about something in a home group or service meeting. It turns out that yes, group conscience can be a vote, but it's also more abstract, subtle, unspoken. In this case, it's the actions of our Treasure Valley fellowship combined with the higher power of the facility itself. I trust our collective higher powers to guide us in carrying the message to the still suffering addict in whatever way we are meant to- whether it's through panel meetings or literature, online meeting spaces, or good old fashion open meetings in church basements. Through this experience in service, I am learning to trust this fellowship to carry on in whatever way it is supposed to- just like we did during the covid situation, just like we did when felons weren't allowed to congregate when our predecessors blazed the trail for us, and just like it will in 100 years.

Molly W.



What Does Our Literature Say?

Hospitals and Institutions



Hospitals and Institutions Service and the NA Member

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Many Narcotics Anonymous members have found Hospitals and Institutions service to be an important part of their personal recovery. Our members, who actively participate in H&I service, are very important resources in our fellowship. A commitment to H&I service is one of the many ways to become involved with the NA service structure and help us feel a part of our fellowship.

We know that active addiction leads to jails, institutions, and death. Also, NA's primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. It is not surprising that carrying the NA message of recovery into hospitals and institutions is one of our priorities. NA members have consistently supported this belief by forming Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) committees around the world.

Still, some NA members have been reluctant to become involved in H&I service because they have never been incarcerated, arrested, or institutionalized. With our personal experience and proper preparation, **all of us are uniquely qualified to carry our message of recovery.**

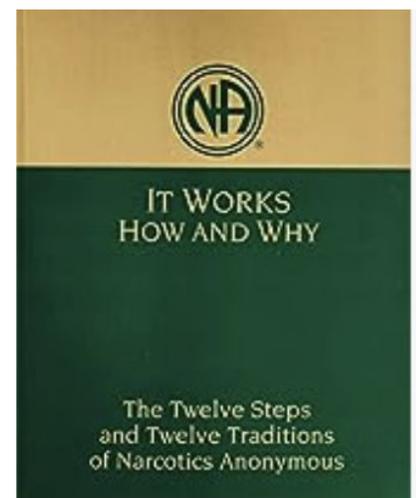
Tradition Two

"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Group conscience can be thought of in much the same way as person conscience. Group conscience reflects a collective awareness of, understanding of, and surrender to spiritual principles. The conscience of a group takes shape and is revealed when its members take the time to talk with each other about their personal needs, the needs of that group, and the needs of NA as a whole. Each member draws upon his or her relationship with a higher power when sharing with the group. As members listen carefully to each other and consult their personal understanding of a loving God, something happens: Solutions to problems become apparent, solutions that take into consideration the needs of everyone concerned....

Group conscience is not fixed and inflexible. We know that personal conscience changes as an individual's relationship with a Higher Power grows and strengthens. In the same way, the conscience of a group evolves as its members mature in recovers, new members arrive, and the group's situation changes....

Only when we listen for the direction of a Higher Power are we able to hear it...A Higher Power works through all of us, regardless of clean time or experience. Group conscience always exists, but we are not always willing or able to hear it or allow its expression. Hearing group conscience make take time and patience. A flexible approach invites a loving Higher Power into our group conscience process.



Overheard

by Beth M.

Overheard is a collection of insightful, interesting, and humorous statements made by recovering addicts, before, during, and after Narcotics Anonymous meetings and activities.

Inspired by our literature, step work, conversations with other members, or seemingly unrelated sources, these quotes can become an intrinsic part of our recovery. The origins of many recovery sayings have been lost to time, repetition, and anonymity. Though the following quotes were overheard, or read, by me directly, it's unlikely that their true origin will ever be known. Enjoy!

“I don't have to punish myself for someone else's bad behavior” – V.O.

“I get irritated and my thinking hits a roadblock” -S.F.

“... When set free of their restraining walls, our hearts hold great power.”
-JFT Daily Meditation, June 17

“Telling the truth creates a radical situation for change.” -B.S.

“You can have low self-esteem and a big ego at the same time. Low self-esteem means I think I'm a piece of sh*t. Big ego means I don't think I need your help.” -S. P-W.

“If blame worked, it would be one of the steps.” -G.S.

“I have a problem with perspective. Especially during conflict.” -J.W.

“Just because I'm powerless doesn't mean it's hopeless.” -B.P.

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