

A newsletter of the Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous.

someone in NA who believes in me

and wants to help me in my recovery

The Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous is comprised of groups & individual members who have come together to support each other in carrying the message in their local communities. Regardless of literature preferences, location or meeting formats.

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Our members speak

Dorine Phelps's Legacy to Narcotics Anonymous; Why Don't We Verify Attendance Documents – Is This An Expression of Group Autonomy?

This article is written in the spirit of N.A. Step Seven, "God often works through those who care enough about recovery to help make us aware of our shortcomings." Sometimes we immature addicts get stuck in an emotional state-of-mind of the triangle of self-obsession – resentment – anger - fear. We make fools of ourselves without even knowing it, by standing up and fighting for non-existing virtues without knowing all the facts. Okay, okay, that's another story. For example: Why are we being asked to do such a thing? Who started verification of addicts' attendance in Narcotics Anonymous meetings? What was the purpose for this request? What is the back ground information? If you keep an open mind and are willing to spare a few minutes of your precious time, let's try to answer these questions together.

Dorine Phelps was one of us. She was an addict who never went through a drug treatment facility. She started trying to get clean without a recovery program in June of 1968. Finally in 1978 she was able to get clean and stay clean for 33 years until she took her last breath December 15, 2011. Dorine is known as the woman who brought Narcotics Anonymous to D.C. But few addicts know her as the addict who single-handedly brought the idea of "A second chance for us addicts who were habitual drug-related offenders" to the attention of the legal community in the 1970s.

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This is our sixth issue of this monthly newsletter. Our intention is for this newsletter to serve as a vehicle to communicate experience, strength and hope in recovery among the members and groups of ARNA. We welcome your input into this newsletter. Please contact us at newsletter@arna.world.

Please send anything you would like to share with other members and groups of ARNA, including - personal experience, strength and hope in recovery; what becoming a part of ARNA has meant for you and your group; challenges and successes you have experienced in becoming a member of ARNA; anything else you would like to communicate with other members and groups of ARNA.

This is your newsletter. We will do our best to serve you by delivering an updated issue regularly, editing your input into an easily readable format, to facilitate effective communication between the groups and members of ARNA. We will also welcome any ideas you may have to improve the quality and effectiveness of this newsletter.

Our members speak

Medication and Recovery – One Member’s Experience

I’m not a medical doctor, so I don’t try to delude myself or you into thinking I know more than a doctor, what is best for whatever condition you are dealing with. I am also not a cult leader or a shaman, so I don’t pretend to know what is best for you, spiritually. If discontinuing medication is your path, as a spiritual leap, or would impede your recovery, that should be considered with all the honesty you can muster between you, your Higher Power, and in consultation with a trusted medical professional and your sponsor. Ultimately, only you can know the right answer, at the right time, after making these considerations.

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(Continued from page One) Dorine Phelps’s Legacy to Narcotics Anonymous;

Dorine Phelps was also a Federal Law Enforcement Probation Officer in the Department of Justice, located in Washington, D.C. We heard her share many times how around 1975, she met with Federal Court Judges in our Nation’s capital, advocating for the treatment of us drug addicts rather than warehousing us for decades in Federal prisons for drug-related crimes. She would say “‘Stead of lockin’ em up, why don’t you clean ‘em up?” After deep thought and many debates, the Federal judges gave in and started considering Dorine’s brilliant idea.

Earlier, Dorine had attended her first Drug Meeting at the local Veterans Administration Hospital. There she got her hands on “The Little White Book” and read about Jimmy Kinnon. She called Jimmy K., who personally answered the phone, and registered the first Narcotics Anonymous Meeting in Washington DC, Virginia, Maryland and surrounding areas. She said “Hell, Jimmy K. acted like he didn’t even care I was Black.” She talked to him on several occasions. He told her exactly how to start that NA meeting. He even sent her a Meeting Starter Kit. He taught her what the NA 12 Steps meant and how to live them in her life. She taught us what Jimmy Kinnon taught her. Okay, okay, that’s another story.

The “Why We Don’t Verify Attendance Documents” information pamphlet seems to be based on NA Tradition Six, “We are not connected to any political, religious, or law enforcement groups and are under no surveillance at any time.” If you take the time to read Tradition Six entirely, it also states, “Our relationship with them is one of cooperation, not affiliation.”

What about Tradition Four’s protection of Group Autonomy? When the groups unite together as one collective body, group autonomy no longer exists. The autonomy of our groups is necessary for our survival as a Fellowship. Are Group Conscience and Group Consensus the same thing? Group Conscience is based on NA Tradition Two, while Group Consensus is based on the NAWS Concept Six. The NAWS Group Consensus concept happens when groups come together as One Body. The Administrator presents an agenda of questions, each group representative votes according to their Group Conscience, and the majority rules. The other groups are forced to go against, and ignore, God’s will for their groups.

This results in NAWS Concept Six, unanimity and uniformity, which destroys the unity as it is expressed in NA Tradition One. This is actually not spiritual because it is in conflict and direct contradiction to Tradition Two and Tradition Four. At this point, a home group is subject to being ruled and controlled by other groups, instead of being led by the one ultimate authority as it expresses itself in that group’s conscience.

One group does not have the RIGHT to rule, dictate, censor, decide, direct, govern and control another group or groups, because each group is self-governing. Is this true Group Autonomy when a home Group Conscience is taken outside of the group and it becomes a NAWS Group Consensus? In this scenario, the majority rules and the individual group is no longer under the guidance of a loving God. At this point, the opposing home groups are being ruled, dictated, censored, dominated, governed and controlled by other NA groups. Is that what Group Autonomy is all about?

The NA Twelve Traditions encourage creative freedom to each individual group, to utilize our own Group Conscience to create and maintain the atmosphere of recovery in our home group. The Group Conscience aids our group when doing our group financial business, making our group decisions, and carrying out our group meeting’s personal

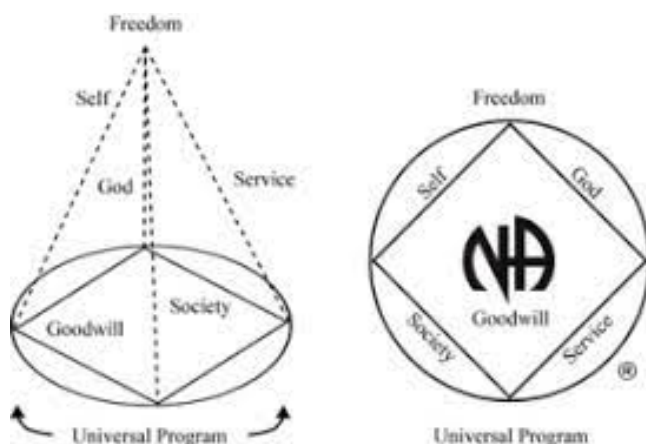
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(Continued from page Two) Medication and Recovery – One Member's Experience

What I can do is share my own experience, strength and hope, what happened to me when I went off the medication I was on, for a condition I was diagnosed with. My spirit told me that I needed more than what the medication was doing for me. I followed my spirit to NA, where I eventually found recovery. Granted, we (my spirit and I) took a 4 year detour into total abstinence without a full 12 Step recovery. I would never invite another soul onto THAT journey. Let me just say that, I no longer feared hell after that experience, because I had lived there for 4 years. There simply wasn't anyone around, that I could find, to help me with that.

I, fortunately, had a deeper surrender at 3 years 9 months clean, on a train ride that changed my life. It didn't feel very good at the time, but I'd finally made the admission that I was completely powerless over everything. Later on, a sponsor helped me to see that was my surrender. From there, a series of events led me to the group where I found recovery. That group DID exist – I'd just been avoiding it like the plague for a couple of years. I didn't ask for help right away, after I wound up there, either. I thought it might be too late for me to get what they had there – real recovery. Finally, after a couple of months, I heard a member share something that caused me to think,

"If this thing could fix her, maybe it could fix me, too." I would later learn, from a sponsor, that was my second step experience. I believed I could be restored to sanity.



The question arose, in my head, when I was preparing to embark on my journey through the 12 Steps with that sponsor – “should I go back on the medication?” I wasn't sure – my spirit was confused on the issue, and my head was completely lost. So, I asked my sponsor. His response – “I have no idea, Pete. I'm not a doctor. Why don't you ask your doctor that question? Be honest with him. Share your experience on it, and off it, and what you're getting ready to do now. See what he says.” Shortly after that, he gave me guidance on the 3rd Step. I continued my journey through the steps while I continued to wrestle with this question.

I talked to my doctor, a kind man at the V.A., who thoughtfully responded, “Well, from what you've told me, you're concerned that being on the medication will keep you from experiencing what you think you might experience with this 12 Step thing. You haven't really tried that before, but you do know that when you were on the medication, you weren't very happy. So, why don't we try this? You go ahead and keep working with your sponsor. Come in and talk to me once a month. We'll put a hold on your prescription until we see if this works the way you think it might. I'll give you my honest medical opinion of what I'm seeing, and we'll continue doing this until we come to a decision.” So, that's what we did.

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(Continued from page Three) Medication and Recovery – One Member's Experience

My journey through the steps was even more than I had imagined. It felt like I met myself, my true self, for the first time in my life, in the 4th and 5th steps. I experienced a sense of freedom, right after my 5th step, that was simply profound, a feeling of peace deep in my very being. I experienced a heaviness as I was navigating my way through Steps 6 and 7 that I subsequently felt lifted, after which I felt a lovely sense of lightness that remained as I went forward into 8 and 9. This sense of lightness continued as I began to work 10 and 11 on a daily basis.

I continued to visit the V.A. doctor once a month. We talked about my step journey. After 3 months, he simply said, "I don't think you need to go back on the medication. What you're doing seems to be working. What do you think?" I felt the same way. Issue closed. I've never wondered since, what I should do about the medication.

Because of my experience, addicts with medical issues have often been drawn to me. I share with them what happened for me, but I do not try to play doctor with them. If they want to go through the 12 Steps, and I have the time to sponsor them, I do. If not, I refer them to someone else who does. I don't tell them what they should do about the medication. I also don't bait them with sayings like, "Well, I'm "clean clean. You're not. You won't have the experience I've had unless you go off your

ARNA

Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous

Group Services Workshop

Saturday • May 22 • 11:00am PDT

12pm MDT | 1pm CDT | 2pm EDT | 6pm UTC | 7pm BST

ALL N.A. MEMBERS & HOME GROUPS WELCOME!

We will have 4 guest speakers sharing on the most important topics affecting N.A. home groups today and answering any questions you may have!

11:00am – 11:15am	Introduction – Who is ARNA?
11:15am – 11:30am	Tradition 2 – Group Conscience
11:30am – 11:45am	Tradition 4 – Group Autonomy
11:45am – 12:00pm	Tradition 9 – Group Services
12:00pm – 12:15pm	Tradition 12 – Anonymity in Service
12:15pm – 1:00pm	Q&A Session – Ask your questions!

Learn more at <https://arna.world>

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workshop

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(Continued from page Four) Medication and Recovery – One Member's Experience

medication, now!" I find that a pretty cruel thing to say, and not very helpful at all.

I simply say, "Let's go. You don't have to do this alone. I will walk along beside you while you navigate this journey." One guy, who was on anti-anxiety medication, wondered if he should go off it. "I don't know – I'm not a doctor. You want help with the 12 steps, I can work with you on them. If you need to be on that medication right now, and your doctor agrees, stay on it. It doesn't matter. Your spirit will let you know when you're ready to go off it. What I can teach you is how to listen to your spirit."

Three months into our work together, his spirit told him it was time to go off his medication, and he listened to it. I supported him through that time, by being there whenever he called, returning calls I wasn't available to take, and continuing to walk with him through his journey. It's been nearly a year now since he went off the medication. It has not been a smooth road. But, it's been a hell of a journey! He experiences joys and wonders like he never knew before. He prays his way through fears that would stagger a person without a higher power. But, today, he has a connection to a higher power that he's cultivated through these steps. He knows that he doesn't have to walk this rough road alone. It's a road that he chose, a leap that he took when he was ready to take it.

It seems that, whenever he calls, I am able to help him through whatever it is he is dealing with at the time. I don't know how that works, I just know that it does. I've been through most of what he's going through, and so I can understand what he's dealing with. That seems to help – a lot. He gets a lot of hope knowing I've been there, and that I am free from most of that, today. He sees how I live my life - he wants to learn how to live his life that way.

I'm so glad I don't ever feel inclined to play doctor with other people's health, or play God with their lives. I'm glad that I am not inclined to act like a cult leader and pretend I know what condition their spirit is in, or if it is a time for them to take a leap of faith. I'm even more glad that by simply sharing my own experience, strength and hope, I get to be of service to a fellow sufferer of what I once suffered from, and in some cases, can make a difference in a fellow human being's life. It really makes it all worthwhile.

Recovery is a personal journey – while we all share the one-size-fits-all 12 steps, the process itself is individual. We do this together, with a sense of goodwill. "Goodwill is best exemplified in service, and proper service is 'Doing the right thing for the right reason'." When this supports and motivates both the individual and the fellowship, we are fully whole and wholly free."



(Continued from page Two) Dorine Phelps's Legacy to Narcotics Anonymous;

style of our N.A. message to recovering addicts, still suffering addicts, and newcomer addicts, alike. However, it is never a good idea to encourage individual groups to usurp the power and authority to rule, censor, decide, dominate, or dictate to another group in our N.A. Fellowship.

Why? Because responsibility without power is ineffective and unhealthy for the group. Each of us in our home group has the right and responsibility to create an atmosphere of recovery of our own choice. The atmosphere of recovery happens when two or more addicts come together and honestly share our experiences of how we stay clean. It is our most valued asset because without it, we do not recover. In NA Step Two we experienced a personal conscious contact. NA Tradition Two concerns us addicts' use of our personal conscious contact to reach a Group Conscience for effective, healthy decision-making. On the other hand, NAWS Concept Six also speaks of a collective conscience or collective wisdom on a Fellowship level.

This NAWS collective conscience is not supported by any of our Narcotics Anonymous principles in the Twelve Steps or in the Twelve Traditions. Why? Because all N.A. groups are autonomous. Our groups are completely self-governing depending upon God-powered leadership. Autonomy protects and ensures that our group will be able to carry our style of the NA message in an effective and healthy manner - that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use again, and can find –not a sick emotional way – but can find a new spiritual way to live.

Dorine went back before those Federal judges with her NA Meeting Starter Kit, which came all the way from California. After months of Dorine's relentless rebuttals and debates, the judges reluctantly agreed to temporary NA meetings on a trial basis. She was assigned a large room "as an addict" and was given the keys for our first 7-day a week NA Meeting Hall. Now that was a true miracle! Can you imagine, a convicted criminal, repeat offender, dope fiend junkie who was just like us being given the keys to a Federal Court House? Go figure. Okay, okay, that's another story. Almost five decades later, the Courthouse Meeting is still in existence, even though it has been relocated across the street from its original location.

The federal prisoners were released on probation instead of being expedited to Federal prisons. The only request made by the Federal Court Judges was that the attendance of us addicts at these recovery meetings be documented in writing. Thus, the signing of the meeting attendance slips. Twenty years in Federal Prison for drug-related crimes vs going to an NA Meeting - that does not seem like an unreasonable request, to a sane and reasonable person in the Spirit of cooperation, not affiliation. Does it?

Dorine's idea started on the Federal level at only one meeting location. Over 46 years later we addicts are still being given a second chance on all Federal, State, County, and Local court levels, as well. Her idea has spread from only one meeting place to millions of meetings throughout the entire United States and many other countries. Obviously, what she started back then is still working today. Take a look at the evidence in our meetings for yourself. Many addicts who were forced to come to NA by the courts are still coming to meetings and have been able to stay stopped for more than 10 - 20 - 30 - 40 years. Clean-time evidence speaks for itself.

Our Fellowship is not some religious "like-minded" cult. Our strength lies in the diversity of our many members. Okay, okay, okay that's definitely another story for another time. Alright, Dorine Phelps is no longer here with us in her physical body. However, in spite of this, why can't we just let each individual addict review the facts and decide for themselves whether or not to accept Dorine's gift and the legacy that she has left behind for all of us in the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship?

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