

## “Anyone May Join Us” -- Building a Truly Diverse Fellowship

As simply stated in the Fifth Tradition, NA's Primary Purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. This principle reflects that, regardless of age, race, sex, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion, you have a home here. Contemplate this principle while considering the community in which you live and then look around at your meetings and see, really see, who is there and who is not there. How can we help that still suffering addict find the commonalties we all share?

It is our responsibility as NA members, as well as members of Public Information, to notice our local membership and to formulate a plan to reach out to those who are missing. Start within your own home group, look around, you see all the familiar faces . . . does the surrounding community reflect your group's membership?

It may be difficult to see the faces of those who are missing from your local Fellowship, by definition; they are not there! Think about the entire range of members of your community, for example, seniors, youth, addicts with differing types of disabilities, such as hearing or sight impaired, mothers, people of color, women, professionals -- you get the idea. If our meetings do not reflect the community around us, it is probably not that there are no addicts from those backgrounds. It is more likely that we have not yet successfully reached these suffering addicts.

What's so important about diversity, anyway? And what exactly does this have to do with Public Information? And me? . . .

Diversity is a foundation block of NA. It Works How and Why states in Tradition One that “{We} all have an interest in maintaining the unity that underlies [NA's] common welfare . . . The importance of unity encourages our groups to look beyond their own little worlds to the common needs of the worldwide NA Fellowship. . . With an attitude of open-mindedness, we seek to understand other perspectives. . . . When we work to ensure the vitality of NA, we're not working just for ourselves but for those yet to join us. . . Our ability to survive as a fellowship and to reach others depends on our unity. In Tradition Five it states that “Our Primary Purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.” In our preamble "How it Works" it states that "The only thing that will defeat us in our recovery is an attitude of indifference or intolerance towards spiritual principles: three of these that are indispensable are, honesty, **OPENMINDEDNESS**, and willingness.”

Encouraging diversity is unity enhancing open-minded work. It requires an open mind to see that I (or the sub-committee I belong to) may be doing something or not doing something to make NA a welcome place. It also requires honesty to admit it and willingness for things to change. If there are addicts out there that has not heard of NA or does not/can not come to NA as a result of something I can change, then I let the suffering addict, NA and myself down. Narcotics Anonymous was here for me when I came in and it is up to me to do what I can for our common good to ensure it is here for all addicts who need NA.

Why should we do this, you might be saying, didn't I find my own way into NA? I found a chair, why can't they do the same? Isn't NA for everyone? Why should we concentrate on those few special interest groups who are not here?

Yes, you are right, Narcotics Anonymous is for everyone, that is exactly the point. While we have guiding principles, which say we have no membership requirements, practically speaking, we create requirements. For example, if you can't read the Basic Text, can't get into an NA meeting, because they are all inaccessible, have never seen a poster written in a manner you can understand or put in a place you will see, have never heard a Public Service Announcement in your language or that is Close Captioned, would you find NA? If you went to a meeting where no one was similar to you, that were filled with people who seemed similar to those who have judged you all your life, how long would you stay?

The reality is that our membership is growing by leaps and bounds, however, when we look around the people who fill our meetings, are, by and large, similar to the prominent group of the surrounding community. One way of looking at it is that we have been very successful at targeting a particular segment or segments of the community. It is now time to take that success and adapt our tools to successfully carry Narcotics Anonymous' Message to other parts of our communities.

One way to begin is to conduct a Group/Area/Regional Inventory focusing on the different aspects of your group, how well NA's message is carried, the general composition of your members, location characteristics such as accessibility, availability of large print and other language materials. Knowing the resources and having a clearer picture of your local fellowship will help in making a plan to proceed from here.

Consider choosing one segment of your local community that is not represented in your meetings and develop a specific plan to get NA's message out to them.

Here are a few ideas:

- ◆ approach a local community-specific newspaper to see if they would do an interview or put a public service announcement in their paper
- ◆ create culturally relevant posters and ads
- ◆ approach local community resources to see if they would like a PI Presentation.
- ◆ ask for help from people in the helping professions who are from or work with the specific community you are trying to reach
- ◆ approach addicts from that community who have stayed and offer your support
- ◆ encourage and support Common Needs Meetings
- ◆ commit to learning about different cultures
- ◆ consider how you can make your meetings more welcoming

The job of Public Information is to let the public, all of the public, know what NA is and how to find us. How and where we provide Public Information about Narcotics Anonymous is a key step to encouraging the growth of a diverse Fellowship. Every effort we make, no matter how small, has an impact, the results are worth the effort.

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