

2006 – 2008

Fellowship Issue Discussions

Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?

The topics “diversity in NA,” *Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?* and “common needs” are all about carrying NA’s message to those we haven’t yet reached. Diversity is about making NA more attractive to anyone who might benefit from our message—whether they are addicts from various races and cultures, or addicts of a certain age or professional background. We believe that reaching a broader range of addicts will not only strengthen our fellowship, but will more accurately reflect the nature of our disease. Just as addiction knows no limits, our purpose is to share NA’s message of recovery with everyone. These topics can help to support our unity and increase our ability to reach those who feel they don’t belong in NA.

In the July issue of *The NA Way Magazine*, we began outlining the 2006-2008 Issue Discussion Topic *Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?* We will continue this discussion in a series of articles over the next two years. The topic *Who Is Missing?* comes from the fellowshipwide discussions we have had over the last four years about a group’s atmosphere of recovery. These discussions asked us to review how we can make our groups more welcoming and attractive. Now, we will begin to focus on the larger topic of diversity in NA and the related discussion of common needs. We hope some of the information here will help us all continue to have conversations about ways to strengthen our ability to attract those missing from NA.

Diversity in NA

Our literature states that “our diversity is our strength,” and this has been a touchstone in our discussions about the topic of diversity in NA. When we embrace the principle of diversity, we reach a broader range of addicts because they hear an NA message with which they can identify. Many of us have experienced what it feels like to be the only addict at a meeting who looks a certain way, or who comes from a particular background. We know that addiction cuts across all segments of society. Our hope now is that recovery in NA can better embrace all segments of society.

Our primary purpose is to carry NA’s message to all addicts, not only addicts with whom we feel comfortable. This topic asks us to look beyond the group of addicts with whom we are already comfortable. One approach to this is considering ways to include those who may seem unlike us. We can ask ourselves, “Do we display favoritism toward those who used certain drugs?” “Do our home groups successfully reach a variety of addicts in our community?”

Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?

In many ways, we are having this dialogue now because, as a fellowship, we’ve seen success and growth over the past years. We are attracting more and more members and have become more diverse than ever before. There are still many

Diversity doesn't only mean making NA's message more accessible to those from various cultures, races, ages, languages, and so on. It also includes making NA's message more attractive to those who have used various drugs, or those from a variety of professional and educational backgrounds.

addicts, however, who feel that NA is not for them. This discussion is about what we can do to make those addicts feel welcome and know that they, too, can find recovery in NA.

The answer to the question *Who is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?* will be different depending on the particular NA community in which we live. We know that we broaden our ability to carry NA's message of recovery when NA communities ask themselves, "Who are the people suffering from addiction in our community who are missing from NA meetings?" Not all communities are made up of people from diverse backgrounds, so the goal of this question is not to create a uniform picture of diversity that each NA community must meet. Instead, each community can look at its own population and ask itself who is missing from its meetings. In some places, professionals may be missing from NA meetings; in others, it may be addicts from a certain economic background. In some NA communities, young people may be missing, while in others they might be struggling with a lack of members with clean time or addicts who used a certain type of drug. What's important is that we broaden our perspective to consider who is living in our larger communities, and how we can better attract those we may not be reaching.

As your World Board, we've talked about the fear of developing strategies to address *Who Is Missing?* Some members believe that using certain approaches to reach those not in our rooms might conflict with our unifying message that any addict can find a home in NA regardless of age, race, creed, etc. We've heard the concerns of members who think that tactics such as common-needs meetings might compromise our unity. In our discussions about these concerns, and in our interactions with NA communities that have successfully reached those missing from their meetings, we've noticed how important identification is for newcomers. Hearing NA's message in a way that allows a newcomer to identify with the person carrying the message has made all the difference for many people.

In many ways, this idea of identification is directly linked to the NA World Services Vision Statement—the goal that NA's message become available to addicts in their own language and culture. This is what common-needs meetings and targeted literature are trying to do: reach addicts in their own language and culture.

Common-Needs Meetings

Targeted literature and common needs are two ways we are addressing the issues of *Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?* and diversity in NA. Targeted literature has become a priority to world services, and common-needs workshops will be held at WCNA-32 in San Antonio next year. There were many discussions at the 2006 World Service Conference about our request to hold common-needs meetings at the convention. The conference overwhelmingly supported removing the language that said these types of meetings could not happen and directed that they must happen at the upcoming world convention.

We heard conference participants offer a helpful differentiation between "common needs" and "special interests." For example, knitting and chess are *interests*, whereas hearing the message of recovery in one's own language and culture is a *need*. We also heard the fear that common-needs meetings could be divisive or threaten the unity of our fellowship.

Our service symbol can be a model for our desire to reach those who haven't yet found NA—the broader the base, the higher we can reach. The broader we make our message, so that more and more addicts can find recovery in NA, the stronger our effect can be on this disease.

We believe there is tremendous value in making it easier for new members to identify with NA's message as soon as they are introduced to our program. That one new member may be the addict who is able to carry NA's message to someone we haven't been able to reach—maybe they speak the same language or come from the same cultural background. It's clear that the more diverse the fellowship, the more members we are able to reach. We hope that each member's level of identification will grow and expand as they progress in recovery, but the effectiveness of our efforts to reach the still-suffering addict depends on our ability to meet those addicts "where they're at." The goal is to make our message more relevant to more addicts so that anyone can come to NA and find that they, too, belong in our fellowship.

Targeted literature is another way of accomplishing that. This literature acknowledges people who wonder if they belong in NA. It says, "You matter to us and you belong here." No two addicts enter recovery with the exact same set of questions and concerns. Issues that are of great concern to some members are irrelevant to others. Targeted literature makes an effort to answer the questions that specific populations face. It can help reinforce the idea that NA is for all addicts, and that no one has to feel alone here.

We've identified the following list of topics as our priorities for targeted literature:

- ❖ youth and recovery;
- ❖ medication in recovery;
- ❖ the benefits of NA service to personal recovery;
- ❖ members with more clean time, and how to inspire continued involvement in the fellowship;
- ❖ older members and recovery; and
- ❖ issues regarding gender.

The need for literature to address these topics has become clear through a combination of requests from the fellowship and from the fellowship discussions that have taken place over the last two years.

Working together to carry NA's message of hope to those we haven't yet reached will result in greater unity for our fellowship. Our efforts to reach people whose common needs have not been met will provide a gateway into our fellowship that hasn't existed until now. When those members gain freedom from active addiction, they will have a choice about the extent to which they wish to identify with other recovering addicts. The diversity of our fellowship continues to be its strength, and by opening more doors to our rooms, we can only experience more freedom in our ability to grow and change.

Targeted literature makes an effort to answer the questions that specific populations face. It can help reinforce the idea that NA is for all addicts, and that no one has to feel alone here.

Go to www.na.org/discussion_boards.htm for all the latest info on Issue Discussion Topics, and participate in Online Issue Discussion Bulletin Boards!



There will be session profiles to help with facilitating these discussions and electronic forms to submit information; both will be available at www.na.org. These tools are routinely updated, so be sure to check the website for new information.