



“Hey! What’s the Basket For?”

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“Hey! What’s the Basket For?”

The NA Principle of Self-Support

A member asks . . .

We have all been told that membership in Narcotics Anonymous costs nothing. “So what’s the basket for?” Someone explains, “NA groups are self-supporting, declining outside contributions. This makes sure we are free to seek recovery our way instead of someone else’s. Before we got clean we took, and took, and took. In NA we learn about self-support and become responsible for ourselves and our fellowship.”

Why self-support?

Self-support is an important part of the NA way of life. While using, many of us found ourselves overly dependent on others. Our families, friends, employers, welfare agencies, hospitals, and jails took responsibility for us when we could not be responsible for ourselves. Our only responsibility was to our addiction. It seemed that wherever we went we were a burden on others. We paid for our dependence in a variety of ways. We could never be entirely free as long as that dependence existed. Our lives were not our own. Our self-centered lifestyle of dependency robbed us of all self-respect. It was a very degrading way to live. One way we start to recover from this degradation is by applying the NA principle of self-support: We pay our own way. Self-support helps restore our personal dignity and freedom. And it does the same for NA groups.

Many groups have something like this written into their meeting formats: “Our Seventh Tradition states that every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. The money collected in the basket pays for rent, literature, and refreshments. It also helps carry the message of NA recovery in our area and around the world. When we need help, NA groups and services are there. The way that we financially support these services is by putting money in the basket.”

NA services have helped all of us. Many of us first heard of Narcotics Anonymous in a hospital or institution when members brought literature and shared their stories with us. Others heard about NA through a TV or radio announcement. We called a helpline to get directions to our first NA meeting. The literature in hospitals and institutions, the TV announcements, and phonelines are the NA services we’re talking about here. If those services had not been there, many of us would not have found our way to recovery. NA services helped all of us find a new life.

When we got to that first NA meeting we sat down and talked with other people just like ourselves. For the first time we were not alone. Others had been as troubled and confused as we were. We heard other addicts share their experiences with addiction and with recovery. Their shared experiences gave us hope that the nightmare we were living could finally end. And as we kept coming back, we got help from others in living and staying clean. We found out that there was life after drugs. We took home pamphlets, books, and magazines written and produced by our own fellowship and bought by our NA group. That literature gave us access to the best of NA

recovery in print. We got phone numbers of other members at meetings. We used those contacts every day to stay clean and sane. All in all, the NA meeting gave us the support we needed for a new life.

NA membership gave us back our lives. And though the only requirement for NA membership is a desire to stop using, many privileges come with it. With privileges come responsibilities. One of the greatest of these is the privilege and the responsibility of paying our own way—to help NA be self-supporting. In active addiction we were always dependent on others. In recovery we begin to support ourselves, and we support the group that supports us. In doing that we help maintain our newfound dignity and freedom.

We also have the privilege of being able to reach out to others with the same help that was offered us. The literature brought into hospitals and institutions, the radio and TV announcements, the phonelines, the writing and producing of recovery materials, and the meeting itself—they all cost money. By allowing us to support NA groups and services, the basket gives us the chance to reach out further than our own two hands could reach alone. We welcome that opportunity—the chance to give back a little of what was so freely given to us.

The basket represents the paradox of NA recovery—in giving to others we help ourselves. Putting money in the basket is our privilege and our responsibility.

How does the basket work?

From the money members put into the basket, the group pays its meeting expenses: NA pamphlets and books, recovery tokens, refreshments, and rent. When the group is financially sound enough to meet its monthly expenses and establish a one-month prudent reserve, it passes the excess group donations on.

A group should not hold onto large amounts of money. When we do so, we compromise our spiritual principles letting *money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose*. This works against the spiritual focus of our program and certainly does not help us in creating an atmosphere of recovery. It is important for us to understand the spiritual principles on which all of our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are based. When we sincerely try to practice these principles, we find that giving is not only a privilege, it helps us immensely in our recovery and our spiritual growth. To give is to receive, and the more we give, the more we get back—spiritually, mentally, and physically. This is true for the group as well as the individual.

We contribute to NA services at an area level, too. An area service committee (ASC) works for our primary purpose in ways that an individual group can't. Group contributions are vital to an ASC to pay for meeting lists, public announcements, mailings, helplines, literature for members in hospitals or institutions, copying expenses, and literature for public information. The spirit of our Seventh Tradition is also carried on in our regional and world services.

In order to truly carry out our primary purpose, our groups must behave in a financially responsible way so that we can contribute to the NA message being carried at every service level, in every country, to every addict seeking recovery.

It costs money to keep our meetings and our services open and operating. We don't accept outside contributions. If we don't pull together to keep Narcotics Anonymous alive and working, nobody else will do it for us. And we wouldn't have it any other way. Each of us needs to do our part to support the fellowship that supports our recovery. Each of us needs to do what we can to ensure that no one like ourselves seeking recovery need die without having had the chance to find a better way of life. We need to do that because personal recovery—ours and our fellow addicts'—depends on NA unity. NA cannot remain united without the cooperation of individual NA members—us. Ultimately, passing the basket becomes an expression of Narcotics Anonymous unity. As our First Tradition tells us, "Our common welfare should come first. Personal recovery depends on NA unity."