

## IP #21: *Staying Clean in Isolation*

In 2020, when the conference prioritized IP #21, *The Loner: Staying Clean in Isolation* for revision, we had no idea what was about to happen. As in any other cycle, the literature survey went out with the CAR in November of 2019. In March, before the conference, the global shutdown began. We had no idea at that time how long it would last or what its consequences would be. After the (virtual) conference, when we began our first survey on the subject and started collecting input, many members were staying clean in isolation for the first time. The nature of the emergency led the project to be shelved. It was reprioritized in 2023, and when we came back to it, our experience as a Fellowship had transformed.

We cannot overstate the auspicious timing of this project: Had we tried to write this any earlier (including in that first conference cycle), it would have been outdated before it was printed. The conference prioritization—and the unforeseen delay—meant that we could draw on resources and experiences that simply had not existed prior. Between 2020 and today, virtual meetings have become commonplace in our Fellowship, and our lives together have in some ways become more interconnected than ever. There are resources available for isolated members today that could not have been imagined when this IP was first drafted in the early 1980s.

At that time, in response to the growing number of letters that began pouring into the World Service Office from addicts around the world, the WSO created the Loner Group to put isolated

members in touch with one another. In order to preserve anonymity and protect members, a coding system was created so that members writing in could be placed in regular contact with one another as “pen pals” and long-distance sponsors. As you might imagine, the workload was overwhelming. Eventually two publications were created as a result: *Reaching Out*, for those incarcerated, and *Meeting by Mail*, for those isolated by distance, physical and mental health challenges, or other reasons, such as caregiving or military service, that kept people from being able to attend meetings in person.

From the beginning it was clear that those recovering in isolation were not necessarily “loners” but members who were isolated for various reasons. Some went on to create NA communities that are now thriving; others were able to maintain their recovery through hard times; still others came to understand the value and practice of long-distance sponsorship, writing or sending one another cassette tapes. The conference reached out to these members when it first created IP #21, and their experience was essential in that piece. The version that wound up on our tables after several revisions is a poignant reminder of those days, but included resources that no longer exist (*Meeting by Mail* went out of print in the late '90s) and did not include the resources—or the experience—of the many members who have found recovery away from physical meetings in the decades since.

We knew that in 2020. What we could not know or predict were the many ways in which circumstances would drive innovation in our Fellowship and beyond, the expanding pool of experience in isolation, or the increasing importance of this subject for so many of our members. From February to August 2022, we posted a survey. More than 500 responses from 33 countries and 45 states showed some surprising results: Less than 25% of those reporting isolation in recovery were experiencing it as a result of geographic isolation, and technology was rapidly shifting the landscape. We reported on this data in the [2023 Conference Report](#).



In the 2023–2026 cycle, we worked with the input previously collected, as well as the responses we received from a new request. World Services posted a volunteer form for members interested in project work and focus groups. We drew from the 85 members who had expressed interest in the subject on the volunteer form to invite those who had experience with isolation (beyond what we had all just been through) to join two focus groups—in total, about 35 members. In those virtual conversations, participants were asked to share their experience: what had led to their isolation, what made the experience of isolation difficult, what about the experience was transformative, and what tools or resources had helped them. Their input was beautiful, brilliant, and highly emotional. Some who were not able to participate or who had more to say sent written input, as well.

We heard from addicts around the world and had lovely conversations with a number of members who have aged into isolation, as well as those pioneering our message in new communities—some of whom are finding support and resources through the internet and some of whom are carrying the message beyond the reach of technology.

We retained the basic structure from the previous version of IP #21. One message we heard resoundingly in both the survey and focus groups was that there are many reasons beyond

geographic location that someone might find themselves in isolation, and whatever the reason, they don't much appreciate being called "loners" (especially since our Basic Text says that before coming to recovery some of us were "devious, frightened loners.") In response to this input, perhaps the biggest unforeseen change to the IP is to drop that stigmatizing word from the title. The revised IP #21, *Staying Clean in Isolation*, offers experience, strength, and hope from members isolated by distance, illness, caregiving, aging, and more—and provides a wealth of resources, from online meetings to guidance at na.org.

There are times when we need NA desperately, and it's just not possible to get to a meeting. Whether we make contact online or by phone, whether we reach out or isolate, whether we build a new NA community around us or a new safe place within ourselves—the program is still with us, because it lives in us.

We are grateful to present the revised IP #21, *Staying Clean in Isolation*, for your approval.

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**Motion 1** Approve the revised IP #21, *Staying Clean in Isolation*, contained in Addendum A, as Fellowship-approved recovery literature to replace the current IP #21, *The Loner—Staying Clean in Isolation*.

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**Maker:** World Board

**Intent:** To update this IP originally approved in 1986 with current Fellowship experience.

**Financial Impact:** None at this time.

**Policy Affected:** None