

N.A. Public Information Service Bulletin

Public information use of billboards and busbench signs

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- \* Your public information subcommittee--  
getting it going, and keeping it going
- \* Sample area and regional P.I. guidelines
- \* Public information contingency plans--  
samples and experience
- \* Twelve Traditions for public information
- \* Sample phonenumber and meeting list fliers

For bulletins and sample kits, write:

WSO Public Information Department  
P.O. Box 9999  
Van Nuys, CA 91409  
U.S.A.

Most local public information subcommittees are familiar with the use of phonenumber fliers, distributed around the community, letting our neighbors know that Narcotics Anonymous exists and how to contact us. In some communities, P.I. subcommittees have taken the phonenumber flier a step further: they've put the same information on billboards, busbenches, and transit signs. The following presents the experience of two area public information subcommittees in these programs. Combined with the basic flier and billboard outlines on pages 23 and 24 of A Guide to Public Information, they may be helpful as you consider developing programs in your own community.

Greater Hartford (CT) Area  
transit sign program 1987  
Dear WSO,

Enclosed is a copy of our plasticine bus sign. Measuring 11x18", they will be placed on seventy-five buses for three consecutive months, long enough for effective exposure. We used red backgrounds for visibility and contrast value, the inside of the buses being blue.

We held back our initial start date for three months so that we could upgrade our phonenumber. We recruited enough volunteers to provide 24-hour coverage, and trained the volunteers for the potential increase in calls. We wanted to minimize the risk of missing a call.

We are being billed at the same rate charged other nonprofit organizations, and the company was willing to extend us credit. We decided that, since we were a relatively young area, it would be wise to prepay; hence, we have a month-to-month renewable contract.

We tried to target the market served by the busses our signs would be placed in, but were unable to do so. The state bus company has a fleet of two hundred buses, and drivers are assigned randomly, with the largest concentration (80%) being in the Greater Hartford area. We notified the other three areas that would be affected. Their phonenumber numbers were given to our answering service, so that callers from outside our service territory could be given local numbers.

Gold Coast (FL) Area billboard program

After extensive research, our subcommittee has unanimously agreed on the use of a new vehicle--billboards--to inform the public that Narcotics Anonymous exists. Before pursuing this idea, we gathered input from sources on a regional and world level. When the WSC P.I. Committee was finally ready to release written guidelines to the fellowship, we put our plans into action.

Our footwork included contacting four major companies in our area. After comparison of production and installation costs, space rental fees, and quality of material, we made our choice. The sign is 14 feet high by 48 feet long. The sign will be displayed for between ten and fourteen months, depending on how the sign stands up to the weather. The company we chose was the only one to offer us a sign made of removable panels, each of which could be removed and reinstalled if necessary. The other companies only offered paper-type banners, and could guarantee them for only one month.

The panels we are using will be hand painted, which will allow us to choose our own color schemes. All we will need to supply, as far as artwork is concerned, is a scaled mechanical drawing of the sign. The billboard company has many locations in our area; our sign will be run on a major east-west roadway.

At this time, we would like to address any concern regarding our Seventh Tradition. That tradition says, "Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." In keeping with this tradition, we accept no special treatment in our P.I. work. N.A. pays its own way. We always verify that the treatment we receive is consistent with their policies regarding all nonprofit organizations.

Another subject we would like to address is our Eleventh Tradition, which states, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion. We need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films." Our subcommittee agreed on the following definition of "attraction versus promotion" for P.I. work: Promotion is telling the public that they need what we have; attraction is simply letting them know we're here if they want us.

We have already tested the waters with this type of attraction with busbenches. We have found these to be most effective tools, so much so that the WSC P.I. Committee has asked us for our input in developing guidelines for busbenches. Since our busbench message is consistent with the guidelines for billboard messages, we propose to use a similar message and format.

In closing, the P.I. subcommittee feels the use of billboards are a most effective way of carrying out our primary purpose--to inform the public that Narcotics Anonymous exists.

Gold Coast busbenches

Intent. The P.I. subcommittee's decision to use busbenches came from the desire to reach a portion of the public that we have heretofore been unable to reach. We have tried presentations, newspaper ads, radio talk shows, and many other methods of reaching all the different geographical and cultural segments of our community. Still, we have found that our membership demographics--age, race, sexual preference, creed, and religion--are out of step with our community.

Our goal is to become so effective and so well-known that no addict seeking recovery need ever die. That is our ideal, but it's not yet a reality. The fact remains that any addict not knowing that there is somewhere to go for help may die of addiction. Those lucky enough to go to jails and treatment facilities in our area may very well be exposed to N.A. through our hospitals and institutions subcommittee, but many more are going without access to the fellowship out of ignorance of our existence.

We decided that we needed to have a clear-cut N.A. message stating who we are, what we are, and how to reach us. The message needed to be placed

strategically to reach our target groups. We wanted our message permanently fixed in a location that afforded maximum exposure, twenty-four hours per day.

Accomplishing our goal was not to be easy. We had to decide exactly what words and information to put on the busbench, what colors to use, and where to place our message. We also needed to find out from whom to rent or purchase a busbench. Other considerations were how best to present our idea to our area service committee, how to finance our project, and how to carry out our project without violating our traditions.

Traditions. Our traditions are very important to service work, especially when dealing with the public. When trying to carry an N.A. message without the guidance of our traditions, our message may become vague, and the true N.A. message of recovery may get lost. As with other P.I. projects, the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous came into play heavily when we began our busbench project.

First we had to be certain that we weren't going to be endorsing the companies responsible for the painting and leasing of the busbench. Our Sixth Tradition states, "An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose." We had to let these companies know that, though they were preparing our advertisement for display, they could not turn around and use the N.A. name later in their advertisements.

We needed to be sure that we would not be receiving any special rates or financial considerations, but that we would be charged the same amount and terms as any other nonprofit organization. Tradition Seven states, "Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." At the onset of this project, the company we dealt with was very helpful, so much so that they wanted to donate the busbench. We didn't want to accept this deal for free, and couldn't if we wanted to remain within our traditions. This problem was solved by subcommittee discussion and careful analysis of our primary purpose and how best to go about getting our job done without compromising any traditions.

As a subcommittee, all we wanted to do was inform the public that N.A. exists, and that N.A. offers help for the addict who wants it. We tried everything possible to ensure that the message placed on the busbench would be well within our traditions, and that it stated only and exactly what needed to be said. We did the best we could as a committee, relying heavily on our Second Tradition: "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience..." When all was said and done, we had paid the one-year contract fee, in advance.

Wording and design. Though each step of this project was important, as a committee we felt that the wording and design of the actual ad was of the utmost importance. We needed a clear message, short and to the point. Yet the message had to state who we are, what we do, and how to reach us, all in language people "out there" could understand. We spent a lot of time on this. All of us drew drafts of what we would like to see on the busbench, and brought our drafts back to the subcommittee for review and a vote. We examined all ideas submitted, studying the words, phraseology, color schemes, and artwork. We finally came across an idea we all agreed on. It met all our requirements by remaining within our traditions, telling the public who we are, and using the N.A. logo and the words Narcotics Anonymous. It told the public what we do--that is, help any person having drug problems, twenty-four hours per day (the per day is implied). The background color of the sign is white, with the top third asking "Drug Problem?" in dark blue underlined bold type. Next is "WE CAN HELP!" in red, with our logo in light blue, and "24 hours" in red. The last line says, "Call Narcotics Anonymous 476-9297," the letters in dark blue, the numbers in red.

Our message is simple, and describes the most important fact concerning us: that we can help! What we want, as do all P.I. subcommittees, is to carry the N.A. message, that there is help for anyone who wants it--anyone with a drug problem, that is.

Phoneline cooperation. The public is also told how to reach us 24 hours per day by using our hotline number. An effective hotline subcommittee is a must for a campaign such as this. The hotline program itself must be operating at full steam for this long-range project. Volunteers are needed who are willing and capable of carrying out responsibilities and commitments. Hotline subcommittee members are often the first to know if a particular P.I. effort is working particularly well; hence, the public information subcommittee must work closely with the hotline, informing that subcommittee of its actions.

Cost and placement. After ensuring that we didn't violate our traditions by receiving any special price reductions other than those already extended to nonprofit organizations, we arranged an agreement to pay fifty dollars per busbench per year. The Jaycees were responsible for providing the busbenches, art, and layout people, as well as the people who actually painted the busbenches.

We were given a choice of locations. The only condition was that if a for-profit organization desired the same location at which we already had placed our sign, we would have choose another. We asked each committee member to look for the best possible location to place our ad, bearing in mind our primary purpose to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Our targets were those addicts belonging to racial, ethnic, and age groups not usually found in our meetings and apparently unaware of our fellowship.

We chose a location of high visibility at an intersection where cars are frequently stopped by a lengthy traffic light. The location was directly across from a major drug trafficking area of our community. According to the Jaycees, some twenty to thirty thousand passers-by could get our message each day. During our tourist seasons, the potential exposure could be even greater than that.

We brought our plans to the area service committee for approval and financing. Initially, we met with opposition, but, after talking over the traditions, we were given the go-ahead and the budget increase.

Six months after we had employed our first busbench we requested the funds from our ASC to retain three more, for a total cost of \$200 per year. Gold Coast ASC has increased our budget to cover these expenses. The three additional busbenches are identical to the first, with the exception that our logo is black against a white background.

Our overall feelings are that, even if we only actually help one addict to recover through this effort, it is well worth the cost--but we do believe that a busbench program is a particularly good investment of service money. The busbenches are permanent. They are strategically located. Addicts who travel those intersections daily will see them over and over again. After doing all the footwork the best we knew how, we left the results in our Higher Power's hands.

Results. Our first busbench brought in two newcomers the first week it was displayed. These addicts told us that they had read the sign, but had gone on to buy and use their drugs. The next day, they had read it again and used the hotline number instead. People who were previously dying of addiction have found a new way to live as a direct result of seeing our public notice and calling our hotline.

The assets of this new tool are:

- 1) high exposure to the public, 24 hours per day;
- 2) it states exactly what anyone would need to know if they or an acquaintance wants help with a drug problem;

- 3) it is a relatively inexpensive tool, especially when compared to the cost of printed material receiving the same amount of exposure;
- 4) it is permanent, and cannot be lost or thrown away as literature can be. In the event of vandalism, the Jaycees would simply repaint it;
- 5) the sign is impersonal, having no opinion or personality, only information;
- 6) it enables us to carry the message to addict in neighborhoods where, for one reason or another, P.I. cannot go, or where clean, recovering addicts aren't found.

We have found that we are better able to carry the message of recovery to the still suffering addict. We all know the value of getting an addict to a meeting. Our problem was how to get the message to the addict first. It works...

If you want to put a busbench program together, here's a list of the procedures we used:

1. Determine whether your area needs to use busbenches, and whether your area is able to handle the calls for help that may result from doing so.
2. Make sure you already have a successful hotline and hotline subcommittee to handle the influx of calls.
3. Let the members of your area P.I. subcommittee determine together whether this idea should be pursued. Then, bring it to the floor of your ASC before any action is taken in this direction.
4. Check with WSC P.I. Committee and regional P.I. to see if they have additional suggestions.
5. Check the finished product to ensure that it says exactly what it is supposed to say, with the correct hotline or helpline number.