

# Reaching through the bars of addiction

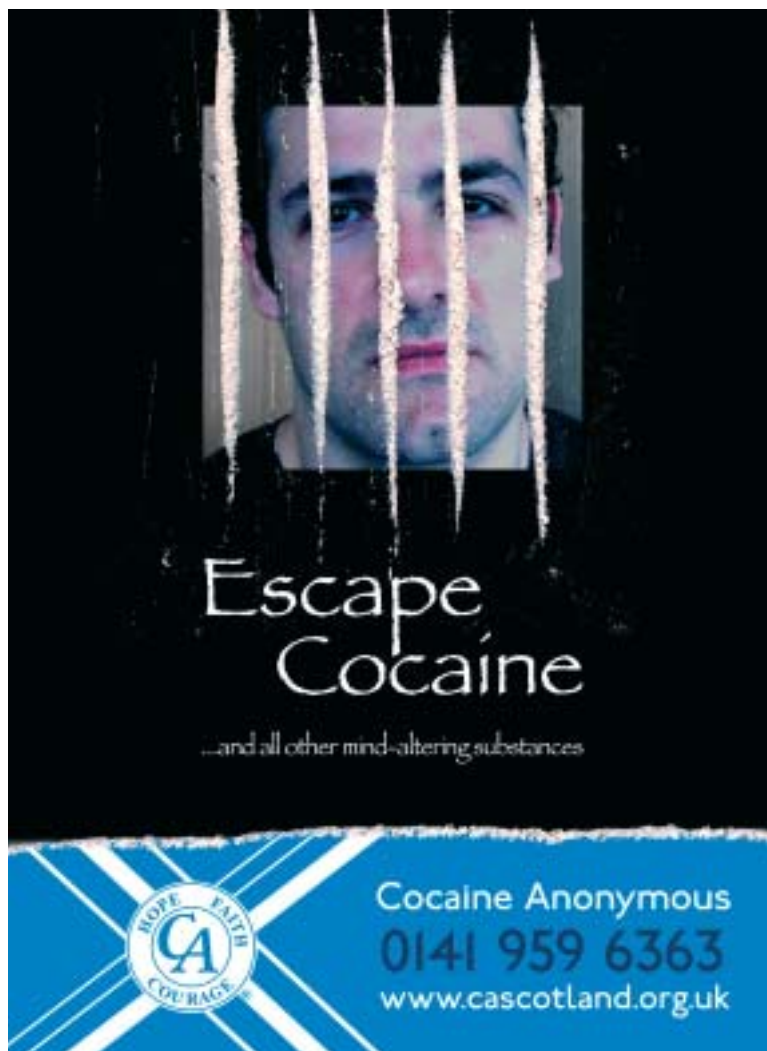
**Cocaine Anonymous Scotland had plenty of help to give, but was struggling to reach those who needed it. David M explains how their new website has freed the organisation from the boundaries of anonymity to reach an exciting stage in development.**

CA Scotland had a problem. We knew we had an effective programme to help those trapped in addiction, but few people knew we had a presence in Scotland. True, we were young among 12-step groups, having only been around for four years, but we were growing, our meetings were full and people were getting and staying clean. We wanted to show that our programme works, but how were we to do it?

'We knew we had something exciting to pass on,' remembers Nicholas, the secretary of the Public Information Committee. 'Our meetings were full of clean, recovering addicts, something drug agencies needed to know about. Yet all we got were blank stares when we talked about CA Scotland'.

There were posters, and word of mouth had already proved very effective – but there was a feeling in the fellowship that we could be doing better. Graeme, who is now responsible for keeping the meetings list up to date, points out that 'carrying the message is the fundamental purpose of our 12-Step programme'. It's a valid point: communication is foremost.

So what is the message? One of the first members of CA Scotland explains: 'Carrying the message – the 12 steps – helps us stay clean and sober and helps others to achieve the same freedom'. CA is concerned with helping individuals who think they have a



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problem with cocaine, crack or any other mind-altering drug to find abstinence.

The public information committee was formed at the beginning of 2005 to communicate our message to the public (particularly drug treatment professionals), to let them know they could refer clients to us. Says Nicholas, 'We wanted to look at ways of letting others know that there are alternatives to the revolving door of getting clean for a few days and relapsing. We decided on developing a website, a helpline with

a rota of volunteers to operate it and a poster campaign as well as writing a press release to let local press know we were here'.

The people in Cocaine Anonymous are diverse in terms of age, sex, social background and training and education. 'Talent and enthusiasm are things we are not short of', Nicholas points out. It was simple to draw on this pool of expertise to help us communicate.

Ian, whose partner is in recovery from drug addiction and who is a

member of 12-step fellowships himself, used his professional background to design the website. What concepts did he bring to the table?

'The philosophy of 12-step recovery is to "keep it simple", and that became our overriding aim. We weren't going to repeat information that was available elsewhere', he explains. 'This was a local message for a local population, the net was the ideal medium'.

'CA is a world-wide organisation; there are already World and UK websites. What we wanted to emphasise was that this message was for those with a drug problem in Scotland'.

Ian explains how the site became reality. 'We took the Scottish flag as our theme. We wanted the site to show that when you are trapped in addiction, here in Scotland, there is hope and that we have found a way out.'

Though the theme of the site is simple, the pages on it are practical and helpful. The meetings list tells people where to find us. There is a link to a self-test for cocaine addiction, a downloadable Scottish CA poster and links to the UK and World sites.

The site gets about 500 hits a month, mostly from the UK, but also from the USA, Australasia and Europe. Several national agencies have added links to us from their own sites and the site has attracted coverage in newspapers and magazines.

The most popular pages on the site are the stories from members' own experiences. Those logging on can identify immediately with how low addiction can take you and yet how hope and recovery can blossom through involvement with CA. As one recovering addict says on the site 'I lost everything that was important to me... but thanks to the people in the rooms of CA who loved me until I could love myself, I am now 18 months away from my last drink or drug and that is a miracle!'

Our convention at the beginning of November was featured on the site and ended up attracting over 400 people to the Hilton Glasgow Grosvenor Hotel for a spectacular weekend, showing to the world that CA really does work. Come and have a look for yourself on [www.cascotland.org.uk](http://www.cascotland.org.uk).