

# Drug Rehabilitation Learning Report with Narconon, South Africa in 2015

## Background:

S.A.L.V.E. International provides opportunities for children and young people (aged 6 – 25 years old) who live on the streets of Jinja, Uganda. Our aim is to build a brighter future with these young people. One of the biggest barriers faced by young people to transition off the streets of Jinja is substance addiction. The most commonly used substance is Mafuta (aeroplane fuel) which is usually poured onto a rag, placed in a plastic bottle and inhaled through the mouth. After extensive local research and consultation, S.A.L.V.E. International determined that a specialist drug rehabilitation programme is needed to meet the specific needs of the young people.

Before starting a new drug rehabilitation programme in 2016, S.A.L.V.E. is going to conduct a series of research and development visits across the world, to learn from others who are already involved in drug rehabilitation work, and to gain a deeper understanding of the scale of street-connected child drug use across Uganda as a whole. This research is funded by Comic Relief. This is a report from one of these visits, to Narconon in South Africa. It is shared publically to help others who might be doing similar research and learning. The results of this report will be considered by a local panel of stakeholders in Jinja to decide which learning should be incorporated into S.A.L.V.E.'s plans for the future.

## Summary of recommendations:

### Twining:

- Having the students focus on helping another person to succeed rather than on themselves is a way to encourage their active participation and interest outside themselves and their problems.
- Having objectives that they are helping each other to achieve focusses their minds and the small wins along the way encourages them that they can succeed.
- It is important that the twins are of a similar ability so that they can progress at roughly the same rate together.



### Life Skills:

- It is very important to offer your students support and ways of coping with real world situations they will find themselves in after leaving the rehabilitation programme.
- Students need to think about the relationships they have with others (positive and negative), the environments they will be in (positive and negative), wrongs they might have done to others, how to make up for them and ways to help themselves to stay away from drugs in the future.



### Drug Education:

- Reaching out into the communities around people who have been affected by drugs is very important to try to reduce the number of people turning to drugs in the first place.
- Having the former drug users be involved in leading the education and helping start drug action committees in local neighbourhoods is especially powerful because people can get hope that change is possible.
- Having a simple but strong message about drugs, that is clear, practically demonstrable and has written literature that people can get away with and share is the most effective way to reach others.
- Make the education sessions interactive and start with the knowledge you have in the group around you so that you can find out any false information they might have.
- Involve the community in how they think they can best share the information they have learnt to get through to others, especially those they think they need to learn the information due to their existing drug use.



### Step-by-Step:

- Having a very clearly laid out programme with achievable steps that both the student and the staff are looking out for will help the student to progress quickly.
- Detailed explanation materials for staff to use and to follow helps to make sure that they are able to keep things to a very high standard as is expected of them.
- Video and written resources to help to explain the programme, as well as having a trained staff member makes it easier for the students to understand what small wins they are aiming for to move forwards to the next step.



### Nutrition and Vitamins:

- As a programme you need to help your students to repair their bodies as best as possible so that they can overcome the effects of drugs on their system.
- A healthy balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables will help.
- A blend of vitamins and minerals to replace those which have been lost through drug use will also help. This will be better for the student than giving alternative drugs to help them to undergo withdrawal.



## Background of Narconon

The Narconon drug rehab programme is based on the research and discoveries of humanitarian L. Ron Hubbard. In 1966 William Benitez was in Arizona State Prison (USA) for crimes related to his heroin addiction. He read Mr Hubbard's book and entered into correspondence with him whereby Mr Hubbard designed a programme that Mr Benitez and other inmates followed to help them to move away from drug use.

When Benitez was released from prison he started Narconon's first residential facility in Los Angeles. The Narconon programme was then offered in juvenile correction facilities and prisons as well as specialist residential facilities in America. Narconon is a Mexican term that means "narcotics none".

Narconon has now been operating for over 50 years. In 2015, the programme is operating in more than 47 countries. Narconon South Africa started in 1975, then shut down and reopened in 1992. Currently Narconon offers rehabilitation services in South Africa and Egypt, and drug education services in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa.

In South Africa, about fifteen percent of the population has a drug problem. The South African Police Service has stated that sixty percent of the crimes in the country were related to substance abuse. Additionally, sixty-five percent of the murders in South Africa were associated with alcohol abuse.



### Key points of the programme:

The programme is aiming to address both the physical aspects of why a person craves drugs and the emotional and mental aspects of why that person started on the road to addiction. The programme also trains the person in life skills that they can use to live a healthier and more productive life.

The programme helps the person to recognise they are responsible for their own condition and that they can improve their state if given a realistic way to do so. It addresses the reasons why they turned to drug use in the first place, to help them to lead a happy and drug free life when they leave. It helps them to move away from being stuck in the past, and be able to exist comfortably in the present.

The programme is delivered in a series of standardised steps done in exact sequence, with instruction videos to break each step down and illustrate what success looks like. Some centres used to combine drug rehabilitation with "Study Technology" training and "The Way To Happiness" training, which are also based on the works of L. Ron Hubbard. In 2015 it was decided to go back to the core elements of the programme to ensure the key objective of living a drug free life is met as quickly as possible (within 3-6 months) so that more people will get the chance to undergo rehabilitation as others graduate.

Narconon is a non-drug based programme, aiming to help people to rebuild naturally, rather than artificially through replacement drugs. It is not a faith based programme.

### Learning visit:

Narconon invited S.A.L.V.E. International to come and learn from their Rehabilitation Programme in South Africa in November 2015. This involved staying in their new Regional Narconon Rehabilitation Centre near to Johannesburg and participating in Drug Education workshops in 2 local schools.

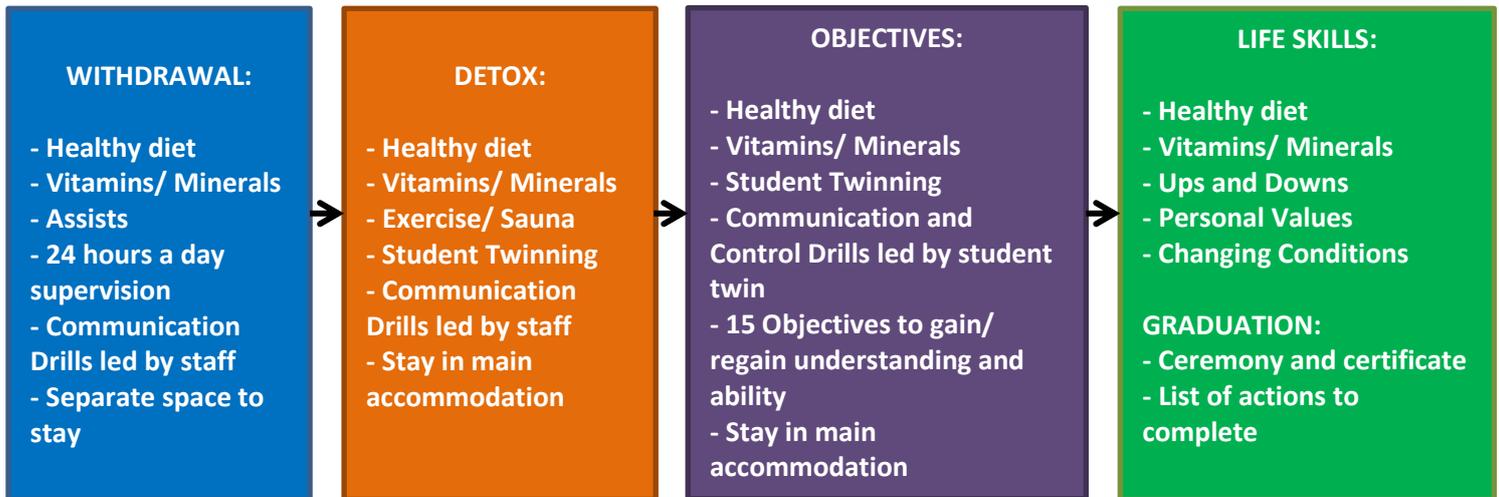
## Step – by – Step Rehabilitation Approach

### Decision to join the programme:

Narconon believes that everyone should have an informed choice to join their programme or not. So they demonstrate what will happen on their programme through videos and explain the step-by-step process in depth with every new student to help them to really understand the programme they are signing up for. If they wish to join then they sign an agreement, with a relative as a guarantor. They will also do a full medical checkup before entering the rehabilitation facility.



### Core elements of the Narconon Programme:



### Withdrawal:

The first step in the programme is to withdraw physically from the drugs they have been taking. They do this without taking replacement drugs, but through the assistance of a natural, healthy diet (lots of fresh fruit and vegetables) with extra vitamins and minerals. This is because when someone is taking drugs they remove a lot of the vitamins and minerals from the body, so they want to make sure these are replaced to help to make the body healthy again.

While undergoing withdrawal they will be with a same sex staff member 24 hours a day (these staff are assigned over 3 shifts so that someone is awake with the student day or night). This staff member will also help them with assists. Assists are actions to help someone communicate better with their body and cope with the physical pain of withdrawal.

They also start doing simple repetitive communication drills to help the student to focus on the present, rather than on the pain or the past. For example they use the “be there” drill to help the student to concentrate on the present and stop their mind from running all over the place. They also use the “have this” drill which allows the student to focus on their current environment and appreciate things they like around them.

The students stay in a separate space and they are monitored with a daily report form that is filled in by all the staff working with the student over the course of the day. This is given to the case supervisor. When the case supervisor and the student observe the student is no longer feeling pain and they are able to sleep and be stable, they will move the student to the next phase. The withdrawal phase can take anywhere from three days to two weeks depending on the student in question.

### **Detoxification:**

When you start taking drugs, the excess stays lodged in your fatty tissues. So even if you stopped taking drugs ten years ago, they might still be there in your system. If the drugs then get released into your bloodstream it can re-stimulate the effects of taking the drug and might tempt the person back into drug taking again.

This is why the next phase of the Narconon programme is focused on the body and helping the student to sweat out the toxins from their system, to give them the best possible chance of remaining drug free after completing the programme. The students enter into a daily routine, starting the day with running/ physical exercise to increase circulation. Then afterwards they will be going in the sauna to help them to excessively sweat. This will be built up from one hour per day to five hours per day over the course of their detoxification. While in the sauna they will be coming in and out to drink plenty of fluids and take cool showers.

They will remain on a healthy balanced diet, with supplementary vitamins and minerals to keep rebuilding their body. This includes a cal-mag (1-3 glasses of a calcium magnesium drink per day) and niacin which they will take in increments until they complete the detox. Niacin helps to release the drugs trapped in the fatty tissue. So it's only when they student can take it in large quantities with little effect that you know the drugs are now cleaned from the system. The student also takes oil to help them to get rid of the toxic fat, by replacing it with good fat. However the oil has to be taken at a different time of day to the vitamins so it doesn't reduce their ability to be absorbed. The student will weigh themselves daily.

The student will continue with the drills from the withdrawal phase as well as adding new communication drills. The "confront" drill helps the student to be able to deal with the situation they are in comfortably. This is done by practicing being comfortable looking someone else in the eye for a prolonged period of time.

As the drugs come out of their system, the student may find themselves experiencing the side effects of the drugs they were taking. There is an onsite nurse to keep monitoring them and check their blood pressure is ok for them to be going in the sauna. The student is now responsible for trying to achieve their daily objectives and filling out their daily report form and giving it to their case supervisor. It is only when they are no longer feeling effects of the drugs, despite the high niacin levels, and when both the case supervisor and the student believe they are ready that the student will progress to the next phase.

### **Drills and Objectives:**

The next part of the programme is to help the students to be able to fit back into society and live a happy, drug free life. They are believed to have especially lost communication skills, self-confidence and the skills needed to control the situations around them. This part of the programme is about small wins. For this part of the programme they are twinned with another person. This helps them to focus on the present and outside of themselves as they aim to help each other to successfully complete the programme. Twins are supposed to be on a similar level, so if one twin is too advanced they might be swapped within the wider group so that all pairs can progress well together.

The programme is run six days per week and every student has Sunday off to worship (if they wish to) or do other leisure activities. The Narconon rehab centres normally have sports facilities for the students and also a clubhouse for them to be able to relax with other students, play pool and watch TV. Family members are allowed to come and visit them after two weeks of them being in the programme, but the site has a sniffer dog to help to ensure the family members aren't bringing in drugs to the student to undo their progress.

This part of the programme starts with drills, with the aim to master them so that you can help your twin achieve their objectives. Since drugs help a person to escape reality, the simple repetitive drills at Narconon are designed to help someone to reconnect with the present. The drills are focused on skills that will be useful in daily life i.e. communication skills, and skills to help you to be able to have control over a situation. The students do each of the drills until their twin, and their course supervisor say they have mastered it and can move onto the next drill. By learning to do these drills for their twin, the students are learning to replicate the support they received from the staff in the withdrawal and detox stages of the programme. Mastering these drills normally takes two to four days.

The drills in this stage start familiarly with those from the previous parts of the programme, for example the “be there” and “confront” drills. The next drill is “how to deliver a communication” reading phrases out of a book as if they were their own thoughts. This develops into the next drill “acknowledgements” which shows your twin that you have heard and understood them as they read statements. The “repetitive questions” drill helps the students to be able to repeat the same question or command as if it were new. The next drill “originations” helps in case your twin goes off topic, so the student knows how to appropriately respond. The “plain body control” drill helps the student to start, change and then stop a situation by physical and spoken instructions. This develops into “persistent body control” whereby the twin tries to do something different to the instructions given. The “intention without reservation on an object” drill helps the student to show they want something to happen without any doubts. This is followed by “intention without reservation on a person” drill which brings together all the earlier drill skills to show that the student can get their command carried out no matter what as their twin increasingly tries to resist them.

After mastering the drills, the twins move on to their objectives. There are 15 objectives or tasks for them to master as a pair using the skills they learnt in the drills. They take it in turns to run the objective, for example commanding their twin how to do a short series of actions, and then swap over when one of them has successfully completed it. Success is demonstrated when the lag time between being given an instruction and doing the action remains constant. It is demonstrated when the student has a realisation or sudden understanding about something. It is also demonstrated when the students have a regained ability to do something or have discovered how to do something better. The objectives are run in sessions which will continue until the student has successfully completed at least one of the final results of the objective. Their twin records their progress and calls over the supervisor when they are satisfied that the objective has been met.

#### **Life Skills:**

The Narconon has a series of life skill courses that are about doing rather than theory. All of them are designed to help a student achieve their goal of a drug free life.

Overcoming ups and downs course helps the students to analyse the people in their life and to recognise the positive and negative characteristics they have that might encourage them into drug taking. They then get individual counselling to think about action plans as to how they will handle those people and situations to make good choices in the future.

The personal values course explores survival, ethics and what your moral code is. It also allows students to explore what their overts and withholds are. Overts are wrong actions they may have done to others around them. Withholds are the overts that have been kept secret and not been told to others. This course gives the student a chance to think about the consequences of their actions on others around them and plan how they can make amends where needed.

The changing conditions course is when the student knows who is good and bad in their life and recognises their own personal values. Their conditions have formulas identifying that there is a liability from doing wrong, based on understanding from ups and downs and personal values courses. The course helps you to plan how to go step by step from your current condition in life up to a normal condition in life by finding ways to correct your wrongs.

#### **Exiting the programme:**

As someone exits the programme their family members are invited to a graduation event and they receive a certificate of achievement. They leave the rehabilitation centre with a list of things they still need to do to fully complete their programme and correct any wrongs they might have done.

The can choose to get involved in drug education prevention campaigns in their local community, or help to set up a drug action committee. Every individual gets followed up for 5 years after the programme to see if they are still successfully living a drug free life.

## Opening New Centres and adapting for different contexts

### Top tips for opening a new Rehabilitation Centre:

Narconon staff recommend that you first need to do investigation to understand the drug culture in your community. Not just in terms of the most commonly used drugs, but also in terms of the effects of those drugs on the wider community in terms of community health and common diseases linked to substance use. This will help you to best plan your rehabilitation and education programme and target your service user group effectively. For example Narconon South Africa has chosen to locate its rehabilitation centre in a game park. This means that their students could tell people they have gone for a retreat in a game park if they are ashamed to admit they need rehabilitation help.

### Staffing:

The staff to student ratio changes throughout the programme. During the withdrawal phase it is one staff to one student. Thereafter it can become one staff to eight students, with other administration staff around the centre in case they need extra support with a case.

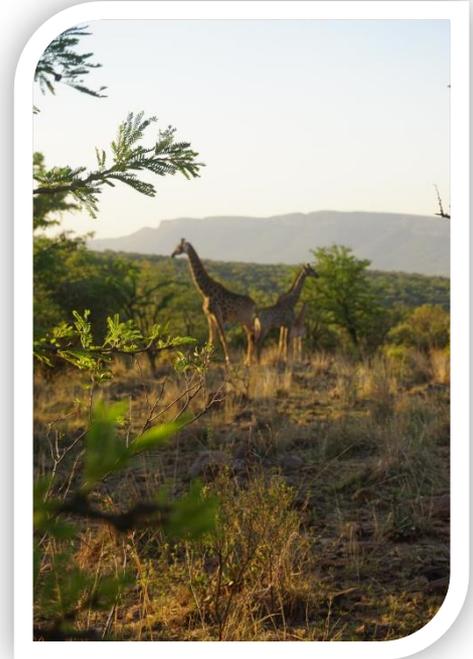
Your selection of staff is very important. Narconon look for staff who should have commitment and passion for the job in hand, to be there for the students one hundred and ten percent in their path to recovery. Having medical personnel on your staff team is important, especially for the withdrawal phase. So having a trained nurse on your team is essential as a minimum. It's a good idea to recruit from the local community try to activate responsibility within the community and empower them to be able to handle their own cases in the future. Having former drug users involved helps, especially for the preventative education elements of your programme. However they should not be allowed to work within the rehab centre until they have proven themselves clean from drugs, for example in South Africa you need to have been clean from drugs for three years before you can work in a rehab centre. The advantage of the Narconon programme is that it is a simple step by step process which most people can be trained in, the key thing is their passion and commitment to do it to a high standard.

### First Step Programme:

Narconon also has a simplified version of their programme called "first step". The first step refers to the withdrawal phase of a person coming off drugs and this is a version of the programme that can be done within a community without a specialist rehabilitation centre. The key element that it misses out is the full detox, which completely clears the drugs from a person's body.

To run the 'first step' workshop you need a meeting place and to train about five people in how to handle drug users i.e. through assists and drills/ objectives. Then you invite the drug users to come with a drug free buddy (which can be a friend or family member). They will be given "drug bombs" of vitamins, assists by their buddy and taught to do drills and objectives to help to focus them outside of themselves and deal with the problems that might keep repeating themselves in their lives.

This is seen as the basic level to help someone to take the first step away from drugs, and then they can consider ideas such as setting up a drug action committee in the community to help others to also leave drugs and share the skills they and their buddy have learnt. This model has been run successfully in Zimbabwe with over 60 people so far.



## Drug Education Programme

Narconon also reaches out to the wider community to help to stem drug use, before it turns to abuse and addiction. Narconon drug education specialists have provided millions of young people and adults across the world with information about drugs and drug abuse to steer them away from taking drugs. This programme has been developed in the belief that a lot of the information publically available about drugs is false. Quite often these education specialists are former drug users who have undergone the Narconon programme and thus can speak from experience as to the truth about drugs.

Free educational resources are available at [www.drugfreeworld.org](http://www.drugfreeworld.org) including films and information booklets such as "10 things your friends may not know about drugs" which is commonly used in schools by the drug education team in South Africa.

### Narconon's key educational messages:

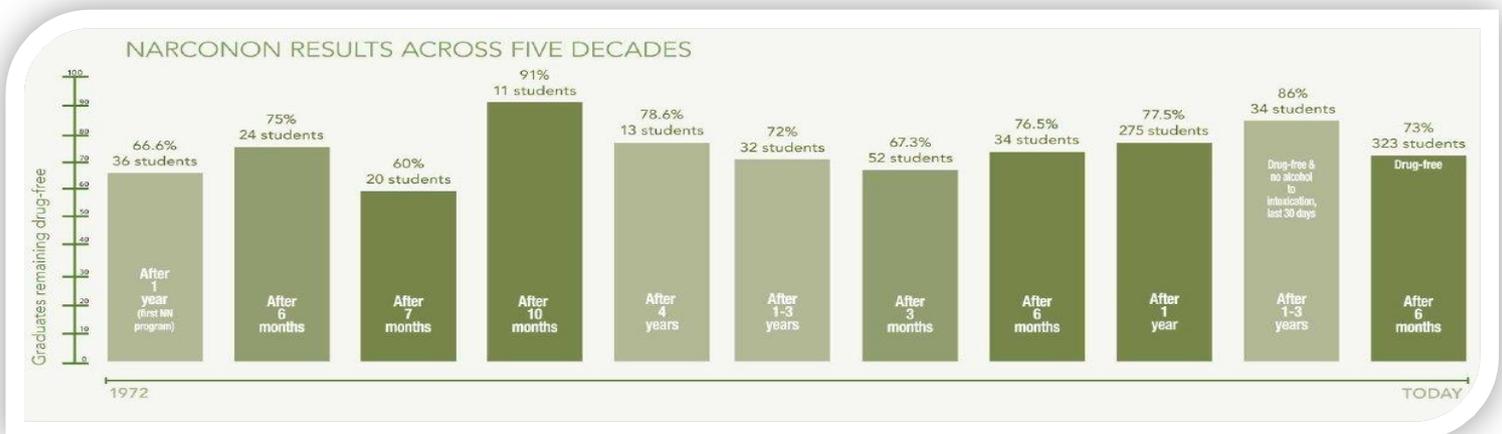
- There needs to be a proper definition of what drugs are. Narconon's definition is that drugs are poisons. A little bit stimulates you and wakes you up, taking more slows you down and makes you sleep, and taking a lot will kill you.
- Almost all drugs affect the brain and mind. The blurring of a person's mental processing can make a person seem slow or stupid and feel like a failure as they can no longer compute information at 26 pictures per second.
- People take drugs to avoid difficult situations or feelings, so when a drug wears off the person wants more to keep avoiding the problem. To keep getting the same feeling from the drugs, a person has to increase the amount they take as they become tolerant over time, but find they are unable to get the same effect.
- A lot of young people get involved in drugs because of boredom, so everyone needs goals to help to make sure they don't get bored and tempted to do drugs to make life more interesting to them.
- Drugs dull your senses and make you less caring and less aware of the world around you over time.
- Behaviour changes could be a sign that someone has started to take drugs. These could include; changing to become introverted, not needing sleep or sleeping at abnormal times, change in the size of the pupils of the eyes, lying about things where they didn't used to lie about them.
- Drugs burn up your vitamin and mineral goodness in the body and can stay lodged in your fatty tissue, even when you haven't taken drugs for many years.



## Measuring Change

Narconon measures success mainly by whether or not a person is managing to live drug free after attending the rehabilitation programme. They used the American federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) components of recovery to develop their own 18 point Routine Outcome Monitoring Survey which is conducted by phone. The survey questions focus on; drug and alcohol use in the last 30 days, drug use since leaving treatment, quality of life and re-integration into the community. Relatives are surveyed if the programme graduate was not available after three tries. This system of monitoring helps to overcome barriers such as not having enough staff time or money to do physical follow up meetings, and graduates not wanting to return to the centre due to stigma or long distances. The current recorded success rate of Narconon graduates six months after treatment is between 70-80 percent.

They measure the success of their drug education programme through before and after surveys to see levels of knowledge, levels of drug use and their planned way forwards with the information they have now been given.



This report was written by Nicola Sansom from S.A.L.V.E. International thanks to help from the team at Narconon, South Africa in 2015. This visit was funded as part of a Comic Relief research and development grant.

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