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**ANNELI RUFUS**  
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## Recovery for the Rest of Us

Twelve-step programs with one or more different steps.

By *Anneli Rufus*  
 Article Published Jan 18, 2006

### Details

**Who / What:**  
 Marijuana Anonymous

Rehab isn't just for bums and black sheep of the family anymore. It's for rock stars and international beauties and best-selling authors and politicians' wives. The road to recovery has long since stopped being a remote and lonely little byway that doglegs through Shameville, Loserburg, and Failureton. Bigger and better than ever, the road to recovery is now a superhighway a billion busy lanes wide. Take your pick among lanes specially designed for alcoholics, smokers, gamblers, tweakers, crackheads. For sexaholics, overeaters, domestic abusers, compulsive shoppers. Lanes for the addicted who are also spiritually inclined, and other lanes for atheist addicts. Lanes for addicted singles, couples, seniors, teens. Addicted hets, bis, queers, trannies, and addicts with HIV. Lanes for substance-abusing Mormons, Jews, Buddhists, pagans ([SpiralSteps.org](#)), artists, and bikers ([SoberBikersUnited.org](#)). Lanes for substance-abusing Native American bikers ([NAIGSO-AA.org](#)). For substance-abusing Bay Area bikers who breakfast together, then ride to Port Costa or Santa Cruz ([AsBillCCsit.org](#)). Lanes for those who cry too much ([EmotionsAnonymous.org](#)), owe too much ([DebtorsAnonymous.org](#)), cuss too much (VulgAnon doesn't have its own Web site, but it exists), and for pharmacists unable to resist their own wares ([APhAnet.org](#)). Lanes for the sociable, the solitary, the studious. Lanes for every kind of addict. In which case, thank God. Or thank that nice dude in the hiphuggers two folding-chairs away, smiling a nonjudgmental smile.

In recovery as in radio, these days it's all about the narrowcasting.

Smoking dope "starts as a social thing, a party thing," says a staffer at Marijuana Anonymous' East Bay hotline ([MADistrict2.org](#)). Adhering to the group's rules, she declines to give her name. "Then the day comes when you're totally isolated, sitting all by yourself, smoking a bowl just to get out of bed. Then you're smoking all day. You're putting your job at risk, your lungs at risk." You're no longer just a funny stoner in a Cheech and Chong film, she says: You're an addict. "But at Narcotics Anonymous meetings, they laugh if you say your issue is pot." Its image is too lightweight, too reggae-and-munchies. That's why potheads -- "we're all still potheads; we're just not using pot, one day at a time," she says of herself and fellow members -- formed a group all their own.

Like most organizations with "Anonymous" in their names, Marijuana Anonymous embraces the twelve-step model created in the 1930s by Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson. The steps start with admitting you've got a problem, making amends to those you've hurt, asking a higher power for help, then working through prayer and meditation toward a spiritual awakening aimed at aiding

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others with the same problem. "The best way to keep your own sobriety is to give it away to someone else," says the woman on the MA hotline.

Despite all assurances that "higher power" can mean anything they want it to mean, some still find the twelve-step language chillingly churchy.

"I'm a preacher's kid," says Martin Nicolaus, a Boalt Hall grad and Berkeley lawyer who ended his 33 years as a drug addict and alcoholic through Kaiser Oakland's chemical-dependency outpatient program in 1992. "I was an altar boy, and I'd already had enough religion to last me quite a while by the time I learned there was another way of getting clean and sober besides the God-centered way."

Today he's the CEO of LifeRing Secular Recovery ([Unhooked.com](http://Unhooked.com)). Its approach, he says, is that every addict can be viewed as a divided person: "Part of them is under the spell of the addiction, and part of them wants to be clean and sober. We connect that healthy part with the healthy parts in other people, and it grows and becomes stronger." That's why at LifeRing meetings -- where members sit in a circle asking each other the key question "How was your week?" as Supreme Beings run and hide -- dialogue replaces that twelve-step standby, the uninterrupted monologue.

"In twelve-step, you're not allowed to do 'cross-talk' -- to have a conversation or engage a person directly," Nicolaus says. "But live feedback is one of the strongest reinforcers. It requires cooperation."

When discussing their pasts, LifeRing members are discouraged from going into vivid detail: "It's good not to forget the bad stuff, but there's always the risk that in the telling, you might glorify it or romanticize it," says. "And that could stimulate you too much. It would awaken the sleeping dragon."

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It's always there, that dragon. It wants to smoke and snort and shoot up and shop. It wants to bet and eat and, hot damn, it wants to cuss. Let this be the year that it can't. *This is a list of links and meetings for various addiction-support groups. It is always advisable to check an organization's Web site and/or call its hotline before attending your first meeting to make sure dates and times haven't been recently altered, and to see whether new meetings have been added to the schedule.*

### Details

**Who / What:**  
 Marijuana Anonymous

### Plenty of Folks Just Like You

A guide to recovery groups in the east bay.

**Alcoholics Anonymous** ([EastBayAA.org](#); 24-hour East Bay hotline 510-839-8900) is the original and most famous twelve-step program. East Bay meetings, too numerous to list here, take place daily in Alameda, Berkeley, Castro Valley, El Cerrito, El Sobrante, Emeryville, Fremont, Hayward, Kensington, Newark, Oakland, Piedmont, Pinole, Point Richmond, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, and Union City. Call or check the Web site for a schedule. *An LGBT group meets Saturdays at 8 p.m. at the Pacific Center for Human Growth* ([PacificCenter.org](#); 510-548-8283), 2712 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley.

**Cocaine Anonymous** ([NorCalCA.com](#); 415-821-6155) is a twelve-step group that welcomes not only those who are struggling with all types of cocaine, including crack, but also those who are trying to break addictions to any mind-altering substance. *Tuesdays, 7 p.m., San Pablo Alano Club, 2426 Church Ln., San Pablo. Wednesdays, 7 p.m. and Thursdays, 7 p.m., 9502 International Blvd., Oakland.*

**Crystal Meth Anonymous** ([CrystalMeth.org](#); 24-hour hotline 213-488-4455) is a fairly new international twelve-step group. *Saturdays, 11 a.m., 114 Montecito Ave., Oakland.*

**Debtors Anonymous** ([NCDAWeb.org](#); 510-595-9690) is a Northern California-based group whose only requirement is a desire to stop incurring unsecured debt. *Mondays, 7:45 p.m., Mandana House, 3989*

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Howe St., Oakland.

**Food Addicts in Recovery** ([FoodAddicts.org](http://FoodAddicts.org); 781-321-9118) is a twelve-step program welcoming anorexics, bulimics, the obese, and all others with food issues. *Tuesdays, 7 p.m., Summit Hospital, 350 Hawthorne Ave. (Annex Room), Oakland. Thursdays, 7 p.m., Kaiser Medical Center, 39400 Paseo Padre Pkwy. (Niles Building, Room G), Fremont.*

**Gamblers Anonymous** ([GamblersAnonymous.org](http://GamblersAnonymous.org); 213-386-8789), one of the longest-running AA offshoots, was established by two friends in Los Angeles in 1957 and now has chapters worldwide. *Mondays, 8 p.m., St. Cuthbert's Church, 7932 Mountain Blvd., Oakland. Tuesdays, 8 p.m., Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church, 1801 Lacassie Ave., Walnut Creek. Wednesdays, 8 p.m., El Cerrito Methodist Church, 6830 Stockton St., El Cerrito. Saturdays, 7:30 p.m., Second Chance, 6330 Thornton Ave., Newark.*

**GreySheeters Anonymous** ([GreySheet.org](http://GreySheet.org); toll-free hotline 1-888-473-9743) is an overeaters' recovery fellowship whose fundamentals are outlined in a strict lifestyle-oriented meal plan known as the GreySheet. *Wednesdays, noon and Saturdays, 10 a.m., Northminster Presbyterian Church (choir room), 545 Ashbury Ave., El Cerrito.*

**LifeRing Secular Recovery** ([Unhooked.com](http://Unhooked.com); East Bay LifeRing Service Center 510-763-0779) is a non-twelve-step program based on cooperative positive reinforcement with no religious dimension and with dozens of weekly local meetings, including those listed here. *Mondays, 8 p.m. and Fridays, 7:30 p.m., Herrick Hospital, 2001 Dwight Way (basement level A), Berkeley. Mondays, 7 p.m. and Wednesdays, 6:45 p.m., Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, 3551 Whipple Rd. (building C, room 4), Union City.*

*Tuesdays, 6:35 p.m., LifeRing Service Center, 1440 Broadway (suite 312), Oakland. Tuesdays, 7:35 p.m.; Wednesdays, 12:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays, 6:35 p.m.; and Saturdays, 10 a.m., Kaiser Chemical Dependency Recovery Program office, 969 Broadway (group-room 8), Oakland. Tuesdays, 7:30 p.m. and Thursdays, 7:30 p.m., Mt. Diablo Unitarian Church, 55 Eckley Ln. (Poppy Room), Walnut Creek. Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., Home of Truth Spiritual Center, 1300 Grand St. (upstairs), Alameda. Wednesdays, 7 p.m., Kaiser Medical Center, 200 Muir Rd. (Hacienda Building, room H-13), Martinez. Thursdays, 7 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 2020 Fifth St., Livermore.*

**Marijuana Anonymous** ([MADistrict2.org](http://MADistrict2.org); East Bay hotline 510-287-8873) is an international twelve-step group with five chapters serving the Bay Area alone. *Mondays, 6:30 p.m., Kaiser Chemical Dependency Recovery Program office, 969 Broadway (group-room 8), Oakland. Wednesdays, 6:15 p.m., Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (upstairs, room 3), Berkeley. Thursdays, 12:30 p.m., St. Alban's Church, 1501 Washington St. (library), Albany. Sundays, 10:15 a.m., Mandana House, 3989 Howe St. (living room), Oakland. Sundays, 6:30 p.m., Unity Church, 501 Joaquin Ave., San Leandro.*

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