

# International Association for Near Death Studies (IANDS)

The International Association for Near Death Studies (IANDS) was founded in 1981 to fund and facilitate research into near-death experiences (NDEs), provide education about them and create community and support for people affected by them.

## Overview

IANDS was incorporated as the Association for the Scientific Study of Near-Death Phenomena in 1978, and then as the International Association for Near-Death Studies in 1981, as a non-profit. In the USA it is also a charitable organization.<sup>[1]</sup>

As of June 2022, it had 1,432 members in several different classes of memberships. There were 82 'Friends of IANDS' groups in the USA and 14 in other countries. It has published a scholarly journal, the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, since 1982, first quarterly and now triannually, and a quarterly magazine, *Vital Signs*, since 1981. It has held conferences since 1982 and annually since 1993, adding online 'Spring Symposia' in 2021. More detailed information can be found in the [IANDS Fact Sheet](#).

IANDS's mission is 'to advance global understanding of [near-death experiences](#) and related phenomena through research, education, and supportive communities and resources.' Its vision is 'a world in which near-death experiences and related phenomena are widely recognized as valid and profound experiences that inspire and create lasting positive change'.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Background

Formal investigation of [near-death experiences](#) (NDEs) began in the 1970s, although accounts of them have been published as far back as [medieval times](#) and are even found in ancient literature. The first person to document NDE cases was Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, followed by German theologian Johann Hampe whose book was published in English in 1979. Raymond Moody's bestselling *Life After Life* (1975) created wide public interest in NDEs and prompted researchers to study them. They include, in the UK: Paul and Linda Badham, Margot Grey, David Lorimer, and [Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick](#); and in the US: [Kenneth Ring](#), [Bruce Greyson](#), Michael Sabom, Michael Grosso and Carol Zaleski.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Foundation

The explosion of interest in NDEs highlighted a need for an organization to unite and strengthen the field. The first initiative was led by John Audette, who had become friends with Raymond Moody after organizing a well-attended lecture by him in 1974. Audette also introduced Moody to Kübler-Ross. After contacting and meeting interested people from all over the USA, Audette convened a meeting in

November 1977 in Charlottesville, Virginia. In attendance were Moody and his wife, Ring, Greyson, Sabom, Audette and other interested parties. The Association for the Scientific Study of Near-Death Phenomena was founded and, according to Audette, its mission defined: 'to assist researchers, experiencers and the interested public'.<sup>[4]</sup>

## History

As executive director, Audette oversaw the formalization of the organization over the next three years, working from his residence in Peoria, Illinois. It incorporated as a non-profit and gained charitable status during this time, and held its first board meeting in St. Louis, Kentucky, in 1978.

In 1981 Audette had Ring take over leadership of the organization. With the help of a sympathetic department head, Ring found office space for the organization at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. He renamed and reincorporated it as IANDS, and with the help of Greyson and a team of graduate students, expanded its capacity, commencing publication of its magazine in 1981 and its scholarly journal in 1982. The journal was first edited for a short time by Ring; Greyson took it over at Ring's request and remained editor for eighteen years.

In these formative years, IANDS was run entirely on volunteer labour. Finances were tight, requiring the organizers to contribute funds personally. IANDS was able with difficulty to hire paid staff in the mid-80s, but for some time the organization was run out of organizers' residences. At this time, a schism developed between members whose interest was scientific, focused on acquiring knowledge, and those whose interest was therapeutic, helping people who had experienced a NDE to integrate it.

The organization weathered these troubles, however. The first IANDS conference in 1989, accompanied by a day program on how to start, run and sustain 'Friends of IANDS' groups, produced such an increase in membership that IANDS liquid assets increased tenfold. A three-year cycle of national, international and regional conferences positioned the organization well for long-term financial stability and a solid membership base.

IANDS has continued to expand its capacity. It established a comprehensive website (see below), created an education program for healthcare providers and set up a grant program for at least twelve American medical schools; among other activities it has also organized retreats for near-death-experiencers.

IANDS has had to balance conflicting spiritual and administrative imperatives. Former president Nancy Evans Bush writes:

For an association whose founders were predominantly academic and whose membership largely believed its purpose to be essentially idealistic and spiritual, the necessity for mundane business practices was an often painful exercise, sometimes felt to be even a betrayal of organizational purpose ... IANDS' survival depended on its ability to learn how to function as much from

practicality as from idealism, and from management principles as well as charisma.

The idealism of its founder members has given way to greater realism. Greyson writes:

When we first started this organization ... we had both dreams and fears of great magnitude, of near-death research transforming science and medicine and indeed all of western civilization ... Now that I am 20 years older and more experienced, if not wiser, my hopes are more humble and at the same time more profound: that this work we are doing will transform not civilization, but men and women – and children – one at a time, as they struggle with the effects of their spiritual awakenings or with their yearning to have such an awakening.

## Resources

Resources on the [IANDS website](#) include first-person descriptions, advice, videos, reading recommendations and a catalogue of publications and conference recordings. The IANDS Press Kit can be downloaded [here](#).

KM Wehrstein

## Literature

Sartori, P. (2015). [Near-Death Experience](#). *Psi Encyclopedia*. London: Society for Psychical Research.

## Endnotes

### Footnotes

1. ^ All information in this section is drawn from the [IANDS Fact Sheet](#).
2. ^ IANDS: [Strategic Plan](#)
3. ^ Sartori (2015).
4. ^ All information in this section and the next is drawn from IANDS: [The History of IANDS](#).

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