

LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

SAVING A FAMILY

Day in and day out, behind the scenes, the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP) is continuously immersed in assisting law students, lawyers, judges and their family members through all sorts of mental health challenges. Under the protection of La. R.S. 37:221, all information received by JLAP is strictly privileged and confidential.

The paths to JLAP are diverse. There is an unfortunate misperception in some quarters that JLAP only offers help in disciplinary or bar admissions cases, and where the person is under scrutiny from a third party. On the contrary, JLAP is a restorative and compassionate entity at its core and operates independently and confidentially.

JLAP is not part of the disciplinary or bar admissions systems. JLAP's primary mission is to promote and provide completely confidential and proactive clinical mental health assistance to the impaired law student, lawyer or judge (or family member of any lawyer or judge) *before* the situation escalates from a personal health issue into a professional licensure issue.

In recent years, JLAP has expended great effort toward increasing the profession's awareness of its true mission and services. It is a serious challenge because it is not possible for JLAP to advertise the numerous, confidential success stories.

Historically, virtually everything published about JLAP's outcomes appeared in the form of Disciplinary Board and Supreme Court opinions wherein the person had run afoul of the disciplinary system. Thus, it is no wonder that many people are unaware that JLAP offers free and confidential mental health services that have nothing whatsoever to do with discipline.

In the past five years, the *Louisiana Bar Journal* has been invaluable in helping JLAP promote its confidential

services. JLAP recently received a heartwarming "thank you" letter from a family that learned of JLAP as the direct result of JLAP's article in the *Louisiana Bar Journal*. JLAP received permission to publicize the letter so it may serve to encourage other families to reach out to JLAP and take advantage of its services.

Dear JLAP,

This letter may be unique in that it is written from the perspective of family members of a wonderful person, who is an attorney and a recovering addict. However, our story is not unique in that the effect of an active addiction within this family unit was baffling, confusing and destructive. It is our hope that these words will encourage anyone or any family member to contact the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP) if you are living with addiction in your family and are searching for help.

Briefly, we were attempting to cope with the struggles of addiction on our own, by controlling, fixing and blaming the addict for a disease that was clearly destroying his life and those around him. While stating that all was well and there was no need to worry, the downward spiral of a law practice and personal life was evident. However, we simply did not understand what was happening and we were powerless to do anything that would genuinely help.

JLAP came to our attention through a mutual friend who had read an article in the Louisiana Bar Journal. Having no other viable options, JLAP was contacted and, without delay, the long and difficult road to recovery began. This work on recovery was not only for the addict, but surprisingly became recovery work for the family as well. During the intensive inpatient treatment program supported by JLAP, we were also supported and encour-

aged by JLAP to receive help for ourselves through a Structured Family Recovery Program. As our loved one diligently worked and received treatment based on the 12-Step Program, we simultaneously met and worked as a family group to address our individual needs, taking the focus off of the addict and providing a venue for individual recovery using the principles of the Al Anon program as the foundation.

Without the direct support, guidance and understanding of JLAP, specifically Buddy Stockwell and Leah Rosa, this family would not be experiencing the indescribable benefits of treatment and the recovery process of addiction. It is true that addiction is a family disease, impacting many. However, just as there are no words to describe the pain of an active addiction, there are no words to adequately describe lives lived in the recovery process, both for the addict and the family that loves and supports each other.

*Sincerely,
A Grateful Family*

If you or someone you know is suffering with any mental health issue, do not wait. Make the confidential call to JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlap@louisianajlap.com, or visit us at www.louisianajlap.com. Together, we are confidentially saving lives, families and careers. And that is the pure essence of what JLAP is all about!

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