

LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

JLAP HELP ON THE RISE

Over the past five years, the Louisiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP) has been significantly improved on many fronts, including the development of a highly-skilled, in-house professional clinical staff and the expansion of JLAP's services to include assistance with all mental health issues, not just substance abuse.

For JLAP, the most central mission is encouraging people to reach out for JLAP's help confidentially *before* the problem impacts the person's ability to practice law. When a person gets help early, everyone wins — the person, their peers, the profession, the public and, of course, their family.

JLAP has now reached an inflection point wherein it currently provides more help to totally voluntary and confidential clients than any other category of referral. In JLAP's most recent fiscal year (July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2016), 55 percent of JLAP's new cases were totally voluntary and confidential. Those people obtained JLAP's help without anyone else ever knowing about it. That is how it works under the plain language of La. R.S. 37:221 — no one at JLAP can disclose any information whatsoever about a case unless the person waives confidentiality and instructs JLAP to share information with a third party.

There has been a longstanding misperception in some quarters that JLAP's help is not confidential and that JLAP is only involved with people who are in disciplinary trouble, perhaps because court orders are published and refer to JLAP participation, whereas nothing gets published about JLAP's large percentage of totally confidential cases.

Worse still, some misperceive that JLAP is an arm of discipline and punitive, and that a call to JLAP will result in JLAP referring the case to discipline. That is patently false. JLAP never contacts discipline unless the person waives confiden-

Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP)

Your call is absolutely confidential as a matter of law.

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tiality and instructs JLAP to do so.

It is JLAP's current challenge to overcome these misperceptions by providing assertive and ongoing education about JLAP and its reliable mandate of confidentiality. There is no downside to calling JLAP and the caller remains in total control. Very effective, professional clinical assistance is free and readily accessible. There is no obligation for callers to give their names, much less do anything else. JLAP is simply there to help if the person is willing.

The good news for those who choose to receive JLAP's help is that success rates are spectacular. JLAP is a true professionals' program that facilitates demanding assessment and treatment standards that are appropriate for licensed professionals who hold the public's trust. In short, it means that long-term recovery without relapse and remaining fit-to-practice is far and away the expected outcome in alcohol and drug abuse cases, rather than relapse and a return to substance abuse and impairment.

During its last fiscal year, JLAP provided formal recovery monitoring agreements to a total of 130 participants who qualified by completing JLAP-approved assessments and treatment as indicated. Only eight experienced relapse — five relapsed on alcohol, two relapsed on drugs, and one relapsed on alcohol and drugs. As such, JLAP's participants had a 94 percent relapse-free success rate for the year.

Of the eight people who experienced relapse, six of them very quickly accepted the help they needed from JLAP to get back into solid recovery in JLAP. They followed JLAP's recommendations

for JLAP-approved clinical assessment and relapse treatment as needed. Having reliably detected and clinically addressed any and all unresolved issues that sparked their relapse, they are now back under JLAP monitoring and are expected to do very well going forward. Unfortunately, two people declined further JLAP involvement after relapse.

Gauged by that outcome, JLAP's monitoring participants enjoyed a striking 98.5 percent overall success rate as to remaining in the JLAP monitoring program and effectively addressing their substance use disorders in a manner that is reliable and appropriate for those who hold the public's trust.

JLAP's work extends far beyond formal monitoring in substance abuse cases. Last year, JLAP serviced 780 formal files, comprised of 130 monitoring files, 170 new files, and 480 additional files either ongoing from the prior year(s) or reopened due to the client experiencing new or increased mental health challenges. A total of 23 percent of JLAP's cases involved mental health issues such as depression, compassion fatigue and burnout.

The best news of all is that the majority of those who reached out to JLAP last year *did so in total confidence* and more and more members of the profession are taking advantage of JLAP's life-saving services. If you or a peer needs help with any mental health or substance use issue, call JLAP at (985)778-0571; email JLAP@louisianajlap.com; or visit the website, www.louisianajlap.com.

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