

LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

JLAP'S ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

The Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP) has published its Annual Report for fiscal year 2015-2016 and we encourage all members of the Bar to visit JLAP's website at www.louisianajlap.com and review the entire report.

JLAP is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that serves the public, the Bar and the profession by assisting, on a confidential basis, judges, lawyers, law students and bar applicants whose professional impairment may stem from substance use disorders or other mental health issues such as depression. In addition, JLAP helps protect the public from the harm that impaired lawyers and judges can cause.

JLAP is first and foremost an *absolutely confidential* method of providing life-saving help. By state statute and Louisiana Supreme Court Rule, any information received by JLAP is absolutely privileged and confidential.¹

The most exciting JLAP achievement in the last year is that the majority of JLAP cases in 2015-16 involved persons reaching out discretely to JLAP voluntarily and confidentially. In many cases, they obtained completely private help from JLAP before there was any harm to their career, the profession or the public. This increase in voluntary contact reflects JLAP's recent campaign to raise awareness about JLAP's totally confidential help.

As to program improvements, the new JLAP is now a truly comprehensive professionals' program that offers help with all types of mental health issues, not just alcohol and drug problems.

JLAP has completed a complex and challenging transformation process over the last three years. Beginning in 2011, JLAP (then LAP) began seeking a significant increase in funding. Compared to fully-funded leading programs in other states with similar numbers of Bar members, our Louisiana program had fallen far behind. Fortunately, the Louisiana State

Bar Association (LSBA) leadership came forward and made a strong commitment to financially support JLAP.

With funding in place, JLAP has been able to move forward and greatly improve its program. Unprecedented challenges were navigated, such as: 1) restructuring JLAP's governance; 2) amending La. R.S. 37:221 to include judges' programming and to expand JLAP's clinical scope to include all mental health issues; 3) recruiting and developing a full-time professional clinical staff; 4) initiating professional intervention services; 5) offering a new JLAP Diversion Track for judges involved in disciplinary matters; 6) creating a comprehensive JLAP website; 7) producing a new JLAP exhibit and meditation training classes at the LSBA's Annual Meeting/Summer School; and 8) instituting new law school outreach services including JLAP-sponsored mental health presentations and "JLAP Office Hours" wherein a JLAP licensed professional counselor periodically offers free, confidential mental health services onsite to law students.

JLAP has expanded its CLE presentation topics to include mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and compassion fatigue. JLAP also has new protocols for assisting with mental health issues, including the facilitation of appropriate clinical responses and maintaining an in-house library of professionals'-level publications to distribute as needed.

As for JLAP's formal monitoring services involving referrals from discipline, bar admissions, employers and others, JLAP has carefully examined its protocols and clinical standards and implemented necessary adjustments to ensure that it is successfully meeting its responsibility to facilitate highly-effective treatment for licensed professionals while also fulfilling its duty to help protect the public from the damage that impaired professionals can cause.² The result is that JLAP's monitored participants now enjoy a no-relapse

efficacy rate of 90 percent or better.

All of these JLAP improvements could not have come soon enough. A 2016 national study on attorney mental health has confirmed stunning statistics on the prevalence of substance use disorders and mental health issues in the legal profession.³

JLAP's staff is especially grateful to the unpaid volunteers who serve on JLAP's Board of Directors and Operations Committee. These very special people were willing to take on very difficult challenges. The result is that our improved JLAP is a top-tier program, saving more lives and careers than ever before.

But JLAP still needs *your* help in reaching out to the profession! Help spread the word: JLAP offers services on a *totally confidential basis*. If you or someone you know needs help with a substance use or mental health issue, reach out to JLAP confidentially before a clinical issue erupts into a disciplinary issue as well. Call JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlap@louisiana-jlap.com, or visit the web, www.louisiana-jlap.com. Your call is confidential and you do not even have to give your name.

FOOTNOTES

1. La. R.S. 37:221 and La. Supreme Court Rule XIX(16)(j).

2. See the JLAP Annual Report online to learn more about the clinical guidelines and criteria that support JLAP's professionals' programming from definitive authorities such as the American Society of Addiction Medicine and the Federation of Physicians' Health Programs.

3. *The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys* (2016), Patrick R. Krill, JD, LLM, Ryan Johnson, MA, and Linda Albert, MSSW (available at www.louisianajlap.com).

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