

# LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

## POWER OF PEER SUPPORT

**T**he unforeseen is routine at the Louisiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP). When it comes to assisting people in mental health distress, you never know what the day will bring. Not long ago, we received a call late in the afternoon. "My friend has been drinking for three days solid. We are in my car and can be at your office in about 10 minutes. Can you help?"

Minutes later, an intoxicated person (and courageous friend) came into JLAP's offices. As odd as this may sound, the news was *very good*. The person was not in any legal trouble yet but was, nonetheless, willing to finally "let go" and accept real help.

Within minutes, I had a bed reserved at an excellent treatment center, including an after-hours intake. With a plan in place, there was a sense of relief; however, there was a hitch. The four-hour drive to the facility would have to wait until morning because no one was immediately available to make an eight-hour, round-trip drive.

But this person needed to be transported immediately. Waiting minutes (much less overnight) invites a total change of heart and rejection of treatment and, worse, continued alcohol abuse and the potential to generate any number of irreversible, severe consequences. Checking my itinerary, the coast was clear to make the journey myself. In short order, we were in my car and on the road to treatment.

I have completed many such journeys in my life. I know what to expect. There will be two distinct personalities riding with me — 1) the person who is suffering terribly and needs relief; and 2) the active disease of addiction also within that person's brain, a disease that will fight viciously for its life and seek to somehow derail arriving at a treatment facility.

### Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP)

Your call is absolutely confidential as a matter of law.

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As expected, we had many conversations along the way . . . the *three* of us . . . all running in predictably repetitive cycles. "I want help. I don't want help. Let's keep going. Let's turn back. I need treatment. Treatment is overkill." Yet, with calm and unwavering support, this person kept luckily arriving at the right conclusion. "I need treatment and I am going *now* . . . but I just can't believe this is actually happening!"

There was an expected crescendo of anxiety as we pulled into the facility, but we managed to stay the course. I remained in the facility with the person until safely admitted. Back on the road home, I was on the phone with the person's friends and family, reporting a safe trip. My head hit the pillow just after midnight, and I prayed for a good clinical outcome for this person.

These types of efforts are also undertaken selflessly by many of my brothers and sisters in the profession when called upon. There is also a strong, statewide community of peer support in recovery through JLAP and the LSBA's Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Many members are ready to leap into action on a moment's notice to help another member of the profession in need. While these peer-support activities take place wholly out of sight, know that the fabric of our statewide peer-support community for legal professionals is very strong.

JLAP-facilitated treatment, JLAP support and peer support from fellow professionals all combine to provide a reliable path toward the goal of helping

the person establish lifelong recovery.

Addiction truly is a vicious and determined adversary that is cunning, baffling and powerful. Even with the best help, there is never a guarantee of success. The person in this case stayed in treatment only a week. The person sobered up but left the facility against medical advice. Addiction was back in charge.

A few months passed with no responses to JLAP's effort to reach out again to the person. Then, we received a message — the person re-entered treatment and completed it. Soon after, the person invited me to lunch and we reflected on our experiences. I described our late-night journey to treatment (much of which the person could not remember due to intoxication), and the person shared about leaving and then returning to treatment.

We continually shook our heads in recognition of the spectacular power of addiction diseases, expressed gratitude for receiving top-notch treatment, and acknowledged how extremely fortunate we are to be in recovery from alcoholism with our lives and careers intact.

If you (or a peer) are struggling with alcoholism or addiction, don't wait for things to get worse. Trust JLAP and make a confidential call for help. Callers are not under any obligation, the call is confidential as a matter of law, and you do not have to give your name. Call (985)778-0571, email [jlap@louisiana-jlap.com](mailto:jlap@louisiana-jlap.com), or visit the website at: [www.louisianajlap.com](http://www.louisianajlap.com).

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