

## There is Help & Hope: Minnesota's Lawyer Assistance Program

by Diane Anastos

*MN Women Lawyers Journal*, Fall 2004

“There is Help and Hope”. Simple but powerful, these words wallpaper Minnesota Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers web site pages and program brochures, as a reminder of what we are all about.

Founded in the 1970's, Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL) began as a volunteer program providing education, intervention, and support to alcoholic and drug addicted lawyers and judges. A paid coordinator performed the administrative functions, while a volunteer board of recovering chemically dependent legal professionals provided direction. Today, a volunteer board of directors with diverse backgrounds in addiction, abuse, mental health and the legal profession makes policy, while an executive director and assistant carry out the administrative aspects of the organization, and a private employee assistance company provides 24 hour crisis counseling, assessments and short-term counseling.

In 2001, The Supreme Court issued a grant to LCL, expanding its services to include mental health and administer Minnesota's lawyer (judge and law student) assistance program. LCL places an emphasis on the **free and confidential** nature of its services to show its commitment to helping both the professionals and the profession. LCL typically aids lawyers, judges and law students impaired with: anxiety, depression and other stress related issues, as well as alcohol, drugs, gambling and other addictions. The need for programs like this is clear considering that national studies indicate that three out of every ten lawyers are subject to depression, while approximately one-third abuse alcohol or other substances. Our mission is to help members of the legal community who suffer and those who are affected. Ultimately, our goal is to improve their lives and the delivery of justice.

The core service components of LCL are: crisis response, assessments, referrals, mental or chemical health interventions, short term counseling, on-going support through a mentorship program, peer facilitated mental health support group, mental health therapy group and continuing legal education curriculum which deals with professional development and the effect of chemical and mental health disorders on the legal community.

Contacting LCL is as easy as picking up the phone. Information seekers may also get answers to questions through our web site, emailing us or visiting our office. When someone calls LCL for the first time, she/he can expect staff to conduct a brief initial interview to determine how best to assist the client. Depending on the presenting issue, clients may be referred to Total Employee Assistance Management (T.E.A.M.) for crisis counseling, an assessment and referral by a professional therapist, a peer facilitated

mental health support group, co-ed therapy group or even matched with a mentor.

Some clients call LCL regarding one specific issue, not realizing that a mixture of issues or dual-diagnosis may emerge (depression and alcoholism, for example) through counseling or treatment. Colleagues or judges will contact LCL when they observe unusual behavior displayed in the courtroom, and need guidance as to what action to take. In addition, family members, partners or colleagues may be challenged when dealing with an afflicted lawyer's unwillingness or inability to recognize her or his condition.

Colleagues, friends and family may get directly involved by conducting an intervention with the assistance of LCL staff or volunteers, or choose to communicate their concerns about the lawyer, law student or judge's behavior to LCL for guidance. At times, the concerned parties can emphatically encourage and support the client and persuade her or him to seek treatment. Formal interventions are very effective in motivating someone to accept the help she or he needs, as well as educating friends, family and colleagues about the nature of addiction or other behavioral health disorders and the approach which may be most helpful to the afflicted individual.

Additionally, clients who acknowledge that they have been abusing a chemical, are extremely depressed or face a different addiction, may withdraw and isolate themselves from those who wish to help or don't follow through on treatment advice. This presents a challenge to LCL staff, friends and family alike to support the impaired person and prevent suicide.

Constant communication and support are critical, sometimes life-saving. LCL offers QPR: Q(uestion), (P)ersuade, (R)efuse, suicide prevention training. The executive director, a certified QPR trainer, trains gatekeepers in how to recognize and appropriately respond to a person in distress. Any law firm in Minnesota may contact LCL to schedule the training.

LCL also offers CLEs which cover disabilities related to chemical and mental health, professional competence and balance, and collaborates with local bar associations and other to participate in programs dealing with subjects such as the impact of addiction and mental illness in the courts and disciplinary system and prevention-related subjects such as life balance for lawyers, law students, judges, women and minorities. Anyone who is interested in these subjects or becoming a member is strongly encouraged to check LCL's redesigned and top-notch web site for more information. Class listings, upcoming events, treatment resources, articles, LCL's newsletter and other lawyer assistance program web sites are just a click away.

If you wish to learn more, please visit our web site at [www.mnlcl.org](http://www.mnlcl.org) or call us at: 651-646-5590 or 866-525-6466. Remember, There is Help and Hope.