

## Join the Voices for Recovery

**H**e was just a couple of days sober, barely holding on. Fortunately he called NYSBA's Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP) hotline. Our LAP Director, Pat Spataro, put out a call for help to local volunteers and within hours, 10 lawyers had offered to call him, meet with him, take him to a 12-Step meeting, whatever it took to help him through those early, tenuous days and weeks of sobriety. This story of hope, and recovery, is what motivates the hundreds of LAP volunteer judges and attorneys, many of whom have triumphed over their own problems with substance abuse, gambling, depression or other mental health issues, or debilitating stress.

Lawyers, by nature, can be highly competitive, driven, A-type personalities, and more susceptible to the addictive behaviors and depression that often accompany overpowering stress. The statistics are grim. Attorneys suffer from alcoholism and depression at twice the rate of the general population. An ABA study of attorney disciplinary cases in New York and California found that up to 70% involved alcoholism. In its 2005 and 2006 annual reports, the New York Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection reported that alcohol and substance dependency is a "significant contributing factor" in client losses. Other causes are mental illness and gambling. In addition, one out of every four lawyers suffers from stress; and, according to a landmark Johns Hopkins study, lawyers rank first in depression among 105 occupations. Most disturbingly, a disproportionate number of our colleagues commit suicide each year. And it's not just lawyers and judges. Our law school and college populations show a

sharp rise in binge drinking, prescription drug abuse, Internet gambling and depression. The good news? All these problems are treatable.

Since 1990, the State Bar's Lawyer Assistance Program has provided career- and life-saving services to attorneys, judges and law students who are affected by alcohol and drug abuse, overwhelming stress, depression and other mental health issues, and the health, family and work-related problems that often result. LAP also provides collateral services to family members. NYSBA's LAP is guided by the dedicated volunteers serving on our Lawyer Assistance Committee under the inspirational leadership of its Chair, the Honorable Sallie Kraus. This past year, with financial support from the New York State Lawyer Assistance Trust, we hired a LAP Coordinator for the Fourth Department, Paul Curtin. He has already made an enduring difference by strengthening the local Lawyers Helping Lawyers (LHL) Committees, including regionalization of programs among the smaller bar associations. Paul and Al Lampert, the newly hired Second Department Coordinator, joined an already committed statewide team of lawyer assistance professionals.

In April, I had the pleasure of hosting a regional LHL meeting at Levene Gouldin & Thompson, which brought together bar association leaders and staff in the Southern Tier. Our goal was to plant the seed for a coordinated, regional effort to promote lawyer wellness services by establishing a regional LAP Committee. As a result, the Broome County Bar Association revitalized its LAP, and both Broome and Chemung Counties now have a



solid and growing connection with the vibrant LHL program in Tompkins County.

Statewide collaboration is contagious. In Erie County, Dan Lukasik, an attorney with depression, created a Web site specifically for attorneys – [www.lawyerswithdepression.com](http://www.lawyerswithdepression.com). Dan also started a support group for attorneys with depression. This support group initiative is being replicated this fall in Rochester and Albany. These are shining examples among many of the growth of peer-assisted volunteer programs across the state.

In May, the annual NYSBA LAP Retreat and Wellness Weekend was held in Silver Bay, Lake George. As an avid work/life balance and wellness advocate, I looked forward to participating in the retreat, but I did not expect it to be life altering, which is the only way to describe the experience. Together with new and old friends and colleagues in an idyllic setting, we honored Hon. A. Gail Prudenti for her unstinting support and involvement with Lawyer Assistance Programs, particularly in the First and Second Departments. Another LAP champion

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KATHRYN GRANT MADIGAN can be reached on her blog at <http://nysbar.com/blogs/president>.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Barbara F. Smith, Executive Director of the Lawyer Assistance Trust, was presented with the first ever Extraordinary Service Award.

We shared with open hearts powerful stories told by those among us, of their darkest moments, their personal and often miraculous paths to recovery. As LAP Director Pat Spataro noted afterward, "we re-emerged changed forever" by the stories, which were a

"gift to all of us." As I drove down the Northway the next morning, reflecting on that profound and transcendent experience, I knew that I too must become a voice for healing and the spirit of recovery.

Whatever impairment or problem you, a family member or colleague may be confronting today, please know that you, and they, are not alone. Resist the temptation to suffer alone in silence

or to ignore a colleague who shows signs of struggling with an addiction, depression or mental health issue. Let us help you help yourself. Your confidentiality is guaranteed and all services are free. Our staff and volunteers are waiting to help you on your path to healing and recovery. Call 800-255-0569 or connect to our Web site [www.nysba.org/lap](http://www.nysba.org/lap). ■

# Are you feeling overwhelmed?

The New York State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program can help.



We understand the competition, constant stress, and high expectations you face as a lawyer, judge or law student. Sometimes the most difficult trials happen outside the court. Unmanaged stress can lead to problems such as substance abuse and depression.

NYSBA's LAP offers free, confidential help. All LAP services are confidential and protected under section 499 of the Judiciary Law.

**Call 1.800.255.0569**



**NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION  
LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**