

## 2002 LifeRing Congress Annual Report to the Delegates and Members

Section 6.4.5 of our bylaws requires the Board to make a written annual report on its activities and its financial stewardship to the Congress. Here it is.

### 1. Board membership

The Brooksville Congress elected Jacquelyn Jones and Shirley Barber to the Board for the first time and re-elected Marty Nicolaus. In the summer of 2001, Barber resigned. On November 25, 2001, the Board elected Gloria Mills to the resulting vacancy. Pursuant to the bylaws, Mills' term runs to this Congress, at which time a permanent replacement for the remaining two years of Barber's unexpired term will be elected.

The Board continues its stepwise progression toward fully elective status this year with the conversion of two more Board seats to elective mode. They are the seats occupied by Tom Shelley and Robert B. Bradley. The seats of Board members Marjorie Jones and Bill Somers will be up for election in 2003, thereby completing the transition to a wholly elected Board.

Therefore, on the mandatory agenda of this Congress is a regular election for the two Board seats currently held by Tom and Itchy and a special election for the unexpired two years of the seat currently held by Glo.

The bylaws permit directors to be re-elected without term limits.

### 2. Board meetings

The Board met in person on site at the Brooksville Congress on Feb. 18, 2001, and has held two regular online meetings since that time. Tom Shelley, Secretary, has posted the minutes of each meeting on [www.lifering.org](http://www.lifering.org). In addition, Board members have used the Board's internal email list for a number of informal consultations.

Former board members Ron Crane, Scott Newsom and Diane Jeanette remain on the Board's email list and have added their valuable counsel. Feedback from Board members has sometimes been slow. It may be helpful to have regular Board meetings more often on a periodic schedule, instead of on an as-needed basis.

### 3. Finances

We have full ownership and management of our assets and of our financial affairs. Marjorie Jones, CFO, has recently completed a comprehensive review of our finances. At year end, we had over \$5,000 in cash accounts and books on hand valued at \$12,000. Our receivables were nearly \$6,000, \$4,500 of which has now been received. Net income for the year 2001 was \$6,319. The detailed Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Statement for the fiscal year 2001, prepared by Marjorie, are attached as an appendix. In a nutshell, thanks to regular contributions from a number of meetings and to growing book sales, we are free of debt, and we have enough cash flow and reserves to continue operating at our current very modest scale. We have grounds for optimism for the coming year.

On Dec. 31, 2001, the initial four-year period of our nonprofit status, 501(c)(3), expired and is currently up for renewal. We have filed the renewal application. We expect that our nonprofit status will be renewed without difficulty.

### 4. The Service Center

The purpose of the Service Center is "to serve the meetings." Toward that end, the Service Center has conducted mailings, provided telephone and internet referrals, provided speakers, maintained web sites and related Internet services, helped arrange special service meetings, taken a meeting census,

published a meeting schedule, and other activities.

### Mailings

The Service Center has sent out a number of direct mailings to substance abuse treatment providers to help support local meetings in a number of areas, namely:

- Three mailings to about 100 treatment providers in San Francisco, containing flyers announcing new meetings.
- One mailing to treatment providers in New Jersey, containing flyers and the *Presenting* book.
- Two mailings to treatment providers in Rochester, MN, containing the *Presenting* book and, to a smaller list, copies of the *Workbook*.
- A small mailing of workbooks to treatment providers around Montrose, MN.
- One mailing to treatment providers in Las Vegas, NV, containing flyers and the *Presenting* book.
- One mailing to treatment providers in Manhattan, NY, containing flyers and the *Presenting* book.
- More recently, the Service Center has broken new ground by obtaining a mailing list of members of a professional alcoholism and drug abuse counselors' association and sending out Congress announcements. We have also sent out press releases.

Local convenors contributed financially to defray part of the expenses of the targeted mailings from the Service Center to treatment facilities in specific cities.

Mailings of this type, in general, produce few immediate results, and no miracles should be expected from them. They do create name recognition, especially when repeated, and they do lead to increased referrals over the long term when combined with an active and credible local meeting presence. The SC stands ready to continue this type of mailing in support of local meetings in other areas on request of the local convenors and as finances permit.

#### **Information and Referrals**

The SC telephone line (510-763-0779) is now listed in the White Pages under LifeRing Secular Recovery in Oakland CA and should be found via directory information nationwide. The SC telephone line has fielded approximately 150 phone calls since the Brooksville Congress. Perhaps another 200 posts seeking information and referrals have come in to the various email addresses that the SC monitors. The Service Center this year also paid for most of a local Yellow Pages ad.

#### **Speakers**

The Service Center also provides speaker services to treatment centers on request. Since the Brooksville Congress, the SC has arranged for presentations to providers on about a dozen occasions. Practically all of the presentations have included Marty N. in partnership with a number of other Bay Area convenors, including Alicia B., Aram A., Bill S., Chet G., Gillian E., Marjorie J., Marylou B., Robbin L., Syl S., and others. A highlight of the year was the opportunity to present LifeRing to a regional meeting of chiefs of the Kaiser HMO Chemical Depend-

ency programs for Northern California. We look forward to expanding the number of presentations and the number of presenters in the coming year. Treatment providers are prime referral sources for our meetings and we need to continue to put our story in front of treatment professionals as often as they will have us.

Speaking opportunities arranged independently of the Service Center were a welcome development during the past year. Thus Will P. participated in a radio address and Kathleen O. spoke to a guidance center during the past year, both in New Jersey; Glo M. presented to a mental health unit in Minnesota, and Joe S. spoke to counselors at a facility in Manhattan. The Service Center will try to publicize these presentations to the extent that the presenters supply information about them.

#### **Web Sites**

The Service Center is also charged with maintaining the LifeRing web sites, [www.unhooked.com](http://www.unhooked.com) and [www.LifeRing.org](http://www.LifeRing.org). Both sites have been up and running without serious incident. Unhooked.com has been updated about 100 times or about once every three days on the average, and has grown steadily in the amount of material it contains, the number of contributors, and readership. The [lifering.org](http://lifering.org) site has undergone a major restructuring. Formerly this site was entirely behind a wall. Now it contains a public front page containing brief information about LifeRing as an organization, and this is the gateway to an internal newsletter for LSR convenors, accessible via a password. The internal online newsletter is considerably updated, streamlined and more polished by comparison to a year ago, but still lags behind convenor news developments. A proposal to publish a print newsletter is on the New Business agenda for this Congress.

Future development of the web sites will depend in large part on bringing more sober talent into the hands-on development work. We continue to miss the energy and dedication of Marianne Hoffman, an exceptional webmaster who single-handedly developed the Food & Beverage section of [unhooked.com](http://unhooked.com). The addition of a music page was the major development during the past year on [unhooked.com](http://unhooked.com). We had hoped to recruit a new Science pagemaster to succeed Scott Newsom but this job is again vacant. There are development opportunities in practically every department of the web site. The current webmaster hopes to pass the baton for most of the web site responsibilities during the coming year. The web sites help new people find the meetings and orient them about the philosophy and practice of the organization.

Looking ahead to the future, we have obtained ownership of the newly available domain names [www.lifering.info](http://www.lifering.info), and [...biz](http://...biz), which may come to be of importance in coming years.

#### **Online Meeting Development**

Not long after the Brooksville Congress, the Board voted to buy online chat room facilities from Digi-Chat and it named Glo Mills as Online Meeting Coordinator. These decisions have been among the unquestioned success stories of the year. The technical superiority of the Digi-Chat facility over the yahoo and Delphi chats, despite a few minor glitches, has made for much better user entry, retention and return. The coordinator's energy, vision and diplomatic skills have made an excellent match with the technical improvement. Thanks to this combination we now have active chats seven days a week, and chat room attendance during scheduled meetings on the average is now so large that we are confronting new issues of main-

taining meeting focus and quality of content. We have the ability to solve these growing pains and to make steady progress toward the long-term goal of having a live host present in the online meeting rooms 24/7/365. Glo deserves special commendation for her work in online meeting development during the past year.

#### Meeting Census

The Service Center in the person of Marjorie J. conducted a census of meetings in the weeks preceding the Congress. The general picture is that there has been a small net growth in the number of LifeRing face meetings and a substantial growth in our online presence. Marjorie reports that there are now 64 meetings in the US and Canada using the LifeRing name. We have lost some. Our effort to establish a toe-hold in the 12-Step citadel, MN, by way of a meeting in Rochester, did not succeed this time around. That is nothing to be ashamed of. We have also seen meetings fold during the year in FairOaks, PA, Stonybrook, NY, Half Moon Bay, CA and Montreal. We have added meetings in Detroit, Las Vegas, New York City, Toronto, and Austin, TX. We continue to add meetings in the San Francisco Bay Area, and currently have 18 open meetings. You can go to LifeRing seven days a week in this area, should you be so inclined. A particularly noteworthy development is the launching of our first Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) meeting in February, in San Francisco.

#### Special Service Meetings

The Service Center has also been instrumental in arranging for special LifeRing meeting services to a number of local institutions. We continue to hold LifeRing meetings weekly in the locked dual diagnosis emergency ward of a local hospital (Marjorie J.). We continue to hold weekly LifeRing

meetings in an inpatient treatment center of another local hospital (Marty N). We had weekly meetings for much of the year in a halfway house for parolees leaving state prison in San Francisco (Betty D., Kevin H.). We have begun meetings at a dual diagnosis residential facility in Berkeley (Syl S.). We have the door pried halfway open toward a meeting inside San Quentin prison. We have just begun a meeting at a residential facility for patients with a triple diagnosis (addiction, mental illness, HIV+) in San Francisco (Gary E.). Meetings of this type are valuable to get our name known in the treatment community, and possibly even more valuable in the positive feedback we get from patients to whom we provide this service. The LifeRing approach meets a definite need in the patient population, is popular with patients and staff alike, and helps people who would not otherwise be helped. We need more convenors locally to meet this need. It is hoped that LifeRing convenors in other areas will also begin to organize meetings of this type as soon as local conditions are sufficiently matured.

#### Workshops

The Service Center is also charged with conducting workshops and educational events. During the past year we conducted two half-day convenor workshop in Oakland and San Francisco. There is a need to hold more regular meetings for convenors to prevent convenor isolation and to share best experiences and problem-solving tips. It would also be very helpful for convenor development to have the Handbook updated, see below.

#### Meeting Schedule

The Service Center also publishes a S.F. Bay Area meeting schedule at irregular intervals, and mails them out to interested local treatment professionals. Sue T. main-

tains a recorded meeting list at 510-814-2221 for callers who prefer to hear the meeting schedule over the telephone.

#### SC Resources

The SC has its own telephone line, a shared fax line, a shared postage meter, and a share of the standard office equipment and furniture. Recently the SC acquired a paper folder for producing three-panel brochures in house. These resources are shared with the law office of the current CEO. In the future, when finances permit, it is strongly recommended that the SC acquire separate office space and equipment.

### 5. LifeRing Press

The main event at the press this year was going to the printer with the *Recovery By Choice* workbook.

The workbook grew out of our LifeRing meeting at a 28-day inpatient treatment facility in Oakland in March 2000, and went through about twelve drafts that were posted for comment on [www.lifering.org](http://www.lifering.org), plus a 3month Focus Group, before we offered it for sale early in 2001 as a "beta edition" produced in batches of 30 at a local copy shop.

Then this past fall we got an order for 200 of the workbooks from a prison in Virginia where prisoners had filed a lawsuit demanding a secular alternative to AA/NA. Based on that order, and on good word-of-mouth among early readers, we made the decision to send the workbook to the printer, incurring a major dent in our budget.

We have been cheered by the very positive acceptance that the workbook has received from individual readers and from a few pioneering treatment professionals, and above all by our initial institutional sales.

Recently the Virginia prison ordered 400 more workbooks. We have also learned that the book has been officially adopted for use in the secular programs in the Texas prison system, and we have shipped an initial order of 130 copies there. These sales have quickly repaired the dent in our budget. If workbook sales continue on their present curve we will have to begin to file organizational tax returns and address a number of related housekeeping issues.

Although the initial public reception of the workbook has been gratifying, we have a great deal of work ahead of us to make wider audiences aware of it. We have been exploring specialized mailing lists and will be trying for reviews in professional and popular journals.

Recently the LifeRing Press books were approved for listing on amazon.com, and we have had a few sales through that channel. However, amazon.com keeps 55 per cent of the price, and we have to pay shipping to amazon.com, so we almost lose money. This experience has taught us that we have seriously underpriced the Workbook. A book of this size normally sells for \$30 or more, not \$20. We are considering coming out with a somewhat expanded second edition of the workbook when the current print run is exhausted, and this would be priced more realistically.

In the near future we plan to add credit card processing to the LifeRing Press web site, www.lifering.com. We have initiated the application process and this may be up and running by the Congress. We anticipate increased book sales and donations by enabling credit card transactions.

As concerns other LifeRing Press publications, the *Presenting* book has been useful in making first contact with treatment profession-

als, and our print run is nearly exhausted. It will need to be reprinted soon. We have an ample stock of *Keepers*.

In the Press pipeline are two works: the Prison book and the *Handbook*. The Prison book was originally conceived as a tool to get LifeRing into prisons. If the workbook continues to win acceptance in secular programs behind bars, the Prison book may become redundant, and we may want to rethink the concept or abandon the project. In any event, a much higher priority ought to belong to the *Handbook*.

Originally published as *Sobriety Handbook: The SOS Way*, this volume was the original reason to found LifeRing Press as an independent publishing house. Today this book lags behind the tremendous strides that we have made in philosophy and practice as an organization since 1997. Today we would not put secularity as the first "S" but rather sobriety. Today the "tools" collection in Ch. IV looks primitive. Today we need not maintain a studied silence about internal democracy, external autonomy, finances, and other organizational issues, as we did five years ago. Today we can write a much better and more comprehensive book, and we ought to declare this period until the next Congress as the Year of the Handbook, and set ourselves the target to lay a new Handbook draft before this gathering in 2003.

The Press also continues to publish the three basic brochures: *Sobriety Is Our Priority*, *Secular Is Our Middle Name*, and *Self-Help Is What We Do*. These currently cost us 8.3 cents apiece and we make them available to meetings as handouts for newcomers. It is a good practice always to put something into a newcomer's hands to take away with them. We have proposals to create additional brochures and pamphlets that will

require Board attention during the coming year.

One area that needs attention in this respect is internal book distribution. Some of the meetings, even locally, do not have current schedules, brochures, or books in stock. They do not offer newcomers anything to read and put nothing into their hands. We need to encourage the convenors of every meeting to put the printed word out there for the members. Sobriety wants food for the mind. Books and brochures can be great sobriety tools; let's show what we've got. Perhaps it's time to add the role of Bookperson or Librarian or Literature Secretary to the already established roles of Meeting Secretary and Treasurer.

## 6. Conclusion

Counting the Brooksville Congress as our official birthday, this is our first full year of life as an independent national organization. We are still a very small group in numbers, but we are alive, we are afloat, and we have a vision for the future. The Board would like to thank all the participants in the LifeRing network for their support this past year. We look forward to a productive and sober year ahead.

The Board of Directors  
*Marty Nicolaus (CEO)*  
*Tom Shelley (Secretary)*  
*Marjorie Jones (CFO)*  
*Robert Bradley*  
*Jacqueline Jones*  
*Bill Somers*  
*Gloria Mills*  
 3/1/02