



## 2008 LifeRing Congress Annual Report

We're now seven years old as a national organization, and with the recent growth in Canada we're more firmly an international organization as well.

### Highlights of the past year

Among the new meetings that opened this past year are these:

- LifeRing experienced rapid growth in British Columbia with three new meetings in the Victoria area.
- A local independent recovery group in the Toronto area, Addictions R Us, joined the LifeRing network and its three meetings became LifeRing meetings.
- Portland, OR, finally got its first LifeRing meeting, as did Albuquerque, NM.
- The Denver area added two more meetings during the year.
- Two new LifeRing meetings opened in Connecticut, at one of the area's premier health care providers, Greenwich Hospital.
- Twelve new LifeRing meetings opened in Northern California, namely in Sacramento, Vacaville, Benicia, Berkeley, Fresno, Martinez, Petaluma, Placerville, Santa Rosa, Union City, Vallejo, and Walnut Creek.

We also continued and broadened our outreach to treatment professionals. We found the money and the volunteers for

LifeRing to exhibit at three major professional conferences, namely:

- The American Psychological Association (APA) convention in San Francisco in August. We got exposure to more than 15,000 attendees, including more than 1000 members of the addiction specialties sections.
- The annual conference of NAADAC, the national addiction professionals' conference, in Nashville in September. More than 500 attended from all parts of the US and Canada.
- The annual conference of CAADAC, the California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors, held near Sacramento in October. We exhibited to more than 300 participants.

This kind of exposure is very helpful in winning referrals from treatment professionals to our meetings. Wherever our meetings have good referral relationships with local treatment professionals, we get a stream of newcomers at the meetings. Increased name recognition is also helpful in getting meetings started. For example:

- In Toronto, convenors presented LifeRing to a Hospital Board and won a vote of acceptance as a recognized recovery group that is allowed to meet on site.
- In Greenwich CT, treatment center directors approved LifeRing and opened their rooms to our meetings. They expressly abandoned their

previous policy of diagnosing patients as “in denial” for wanting alternatives to 12-step meetings.

- In Vacaville, Fresno, Placerville, Petaluma and Walnut Creek and possibly elsewhere, the initiative to start LifeRing meetings came to us from treatment professionals – although patients were usually the ones to prod them into action.

We also saw some new developments in our online presence, which continues at a vigorous pace.

- LifeRing meetings by conference telephone are now available. This used to be too costly, but with the spread of Internet telephony it is now cheap.
- There’s now a LifeRing social networking site at ning.com, where people can post their photos, videos, and music, and can set up personal pages and blogs. This site grew from nothing to more than 250 members during the year.

Our cause got some important help during the past year from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. In the case of *Inouye v. Kemna*, the court joined other federal appeal courts in ruling that AA/NA are “religious” for purposes of the First Amendment, and that government employees such as parole officers have to offer secular options for addiction recovery.

We have a new LifeRing Press brochure, “*Choice of Support Groups: It’s the Law*” designed to spread information about this court decision and to encourage its implementation.

This past year, we also made Wikipedia. Or, more accurately, we had an entry in Wikipedia, then someone deleted our entry, then someone else put up another entry ... that’s the nature of Wikipedia. Stay tuned.

In response to requests, LifeRing Press also took a small experimental step by commissioning and selling LifeRing lapel pins. These attractive little icons are a subtle way of identifying ourselves to others in the know. If there is interest, these may be followed by LifeRing coffee mugs, mouse pads, coins, etc.

A very important step forward happened this past year in the LifeRing Service Center and LifeRing Press office in Oakland. We hired our first-ever paid person, nine hours a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons) to fulfill book orders, respond to telephone and email inquiries, provide new and existing meetings with the supplies and information they need, and keep the office organized. This modest beginning has made a world of difference in getting book orders fulfilled quickly and reliably, responding promptly to phone calls and emails, giving support to meetings, and generally letting the world know that we have our act together.

This past year, we also welcomed Jim Ringland as the new Secretary of the organization. We are very fortunate to have a person of Jim’s background and qualifications on board.

As is made clear in the separate Financial Report, we continue to operate on a shoestring. We were very pleased to win a \$1000 community grant from the Safeway Foundation last year. We also had a good response to our end of the year fundraising appeal from the membership. We continue

to receive gratifying support from the meeting baskets and from literature sales. However, we will have to boost our fundraising significantly in the coming year in order to keep up with our increased cost commitments.

### Setbacks of the Past Year

It's with great sadness that we note the passing last year of our Board member, Deanna Hall. She is very much missed.

Two other losses weigh heavily. Brain cancer, the affliction of Sen. Ted Kennedy, claimed our Ingrid W. of San Francisco and John G. of Toronto, earlier this year. Their loss has brought us much grief.

We also note with sadness the closing of several LifeRing meetings. We lost the Mill Valley and Sausalito meetings in Marin County, and the meeting in Keene NH, and we learned belatedly of the closing of meetings in Madison and Milwaukee WI in an earlier year.

We also face some uncertainty in the coming year with the Lawyer's LifeRing peer support contract that began last year. According to our most recent information, the State Bar of California appears to be taking its peer support operation "in house" and may not renew its outside support contracts, including ours.

### Plans for the Coming Year

**LifeRing Partners' Group?** An initiative long requested by many is now on the brink of becoming a reality: a support group for family and loved ones of addicted persons, based on the LifeRing philosophy. An initial organizing meeting

toward such a group is scheduled at this Congress.

**LifeRing Study.** As a result of our exhibit at the American Psychological Association, we were approached by two leading researchers on the staff of the Alcohol Research Group (ARG) in Emeryville about a research study on LifeRing. The LifeRing Board of Directors has reviewed the proposed study design and approved our participation. The ARG researchers have filed a major grant application with the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA), and if this is approved, the research may begin as early as the spring of next year. This study will be similar in many ways to the Membership Survey we did ourselves in early 2005. Unlike our own survey, this one will lead to a publication in a peer-reviewed professional journal. If and when this project is funded, all LifeRing participants will hear more about it.

**New Book.** The spring of 2009 is also the projected publication date for a book about LifeRing to be published by Jossey-Bass Publishers, an imprint of John Wiley & Sons. The tentative working title is "*Empower Your Sober Self: The LifeRing Approach to Addiction Recovery.*" Marty N., author of the *Recovery by Choice* workbook and other LifeRing texts, is putting this book together. It will include stories and testimonials about LifeRing by LifeRing participants. The aim of the book is to reach out directly to people who want to get free of substances, in order to supplement our indirect outreach to such people via the treatment professionals. If all goes as planned, copies of this book will be in bookstores all over the country and online by the time of next year's LifeRing Congress.

**Website.** A major item of new business for the second half of this year is a scheduled overhaul and remodel of the LifeRing website. Founded in 1996, the website has outgrown itself like a weedy garden and desperately needs attention. We are already in the process of updating and moving the LifeRing storefront website at lifering.com to a new server. The plan is to move the main entry point of the entire website from unhooked.com to lifering.org, so that people who know our name can find us more easily on the web using the same brand identity. We are actively on the lookout for people with web development experience to help in this major redesign effort, and for people with some content expertise to become webmasters of individual sections.

**Conferences.** We will again exhibit at the NAADAC, CAADAC, and APA conferences this year. The name recognition is well worth the expense.

We also have a slowly growing pile of **unfinished old business** to attend to.

Probably the most urgent of these items is the establishment and staffing of regional and local geographic convenor positions. Approved at the Denver Congress in 2007, this project remains on the drawing board. It needs to take life.

We are not the only volunteer-based nonprofit that needs more people to become involved in taking responsibility. But for us at this time, this issue is a major bottleneck, perhaps the major bottleneck, to progress. When people with ability and enthusiasm step forward and do what needs to be done – as we have seen this past year in examples such as B.C., Toronto, Connecticut, and Northern California,

among others – then LifeRing can experience rapid growth.

We are entering a stage in our development now where we have many of the basics worked out. We have a fairly clear theory, meeting format, organizational process and structure, “brand image,” literature, and back office support. We’ve come to the point where our concept is clear and solid enough to be capable of replication.

Turning that potential into reality will require attracting and motivating more and more of our current and future membership to step forward and take charge of the organization. At the next Congress in 2009, we may want to consider a wide-ranging overhaul of our leadership structure, via Bylaws amendments, to provide a wider range of leadership positions, so that more of the talented and energetic people among our participants can play a defined and respected working role in the organization.

The core of our being – a network of support for abstinence, secularity, and self-help – is vibrant and strong. Every day, somewhere in the world, groups of people are connecting via LifeRing and gaining sober strength in their lives. This connectedness is the vital energy that sustains us as individuals. More and more recovering persons, as well as powerful institutions in the larger world, are beginning to take note, and our prospects as an organization are bright.

-- Marty N., for the Board of Directors,  
5/22/08