



2009 LifeRing Congress Annual Report

We're now eight years old as a national and international organization. We're still here, which is a miracle unto itself. What's more, we're growing, becoming better known, and our prospects for the future are good.

Here's a brief review of the highlights and heartaches since our 2008 Congress.

Highlights of the past year

We reached a milestone in the Northern California region this year when the number of meetings no longer fit on the standard 8 ½ x 11" sheet and we had to go to legal size paper to print the schedule.

The new meeting that broke the mold and forced us to go to legal size paper is the Thursday noon LifeRing at the Veterans' Administration facility in San Bruno, south of San Francisco. That's a breakthrough in another way, as well. We tried years ago to get a meeting started at a VA facility in the Silicon Valley area, but the authorities stonewalled us. Now this door is open. We have a large potential following among veterans, and there is ground for hope that this meeting will, in time, lead to other LifeRing meetings at VA facilities elsewhere.

We saw another door open with a new meeting at the Kaiser Chemical Dependency Recovery Program in Walnut Creek, an eastern suburb of San Francisco. Kaiser facilities are largely independent, and while some have long understood the value of giving patients a choice of recovery pathways, others – including this program in Walnut Creek – were married to the old

“one size fits all” approach. That changed this past year, as we received an invitation to start a new meeting there, amid signs of growing staff support for the choice model.

Even among the old-line hard-core 12-step inpatient programs, there are signs of ferment. Earlier this year, the 50-year old Mountain Vista Farm rehab -- known in 12-step literature as Truman's -- invited a LifeRing speaker to address staff. A substantial proportion of clients there, like everywhere else, aren't benefiting from the 12-step approach, no matter how hard it's pushed, and program directors who are looking for ways to engage and retain these clients (and protect their census) are becoming interested in other options, including LifeRing.

Among other notable firsts, we saw two new LifeRing meetings open in Sweden this past year. Our Swedish friends also produced a Swedish translation of parts of the *Recovery by Choice* workbook. Tack så mycket!

Other new meetings opened since the last Congress include Redwood City CA, Victoria BC, Redding CA, San Rafael CA, Sacramento CA, Charleston SC, Petaluma CA, Winston-Salem NC, and Falmouth MA.

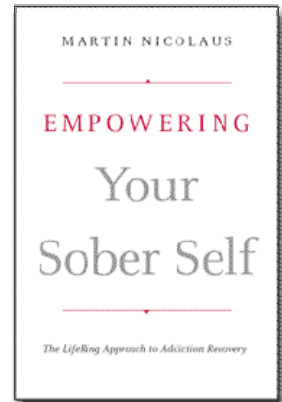
We also saw some new developments in our online presence. The main LifeRing website, www.unhooked.com, has added a new front door; it can now also be reached by browsing to www.lifering.org, and the plan is very gradually to shift people over to the lifering.org name, so as to bring the website name in line with the organiza-

tion's name. A new Canadian LifeRing website is about to be launched, thanks to Michael Walsh in Victoria BC, where LifeRing has also been making great strides on the ground. The year also saw the formation of the LifeRingSoberLiving email list, for people with more than one year of sobriety, founded by Craig W. The older established online channels continue to do well. At this writing, the www.lifering.ning.com social network probably has the largest nose count of any LifeRing online presence, with 388 members, but several other lists probably have higher traffic. We are also just starting a LifeRing presence on Facebook and on Twitter; check it out.

LifeRing Press is alive and well, and continues to be a major source of revenue for the organization. The move to a new online storefront has been completed, thanks to many hours of effort by Karen Ivy. The Press recently published its first DVD, consisting of excerpts from Dr. B.J. Davis' very well received keynote presentation at the 2008 Congress. This DVD is a collaborative effort by Laretta Molitor, who recorded the video and audio and generated the master, Todd Frech of Queen's English productions across the continent in Charleston, who spent many, many hours editing the talk down to a marketable 55-minute length, and Matt Dean, also of Charleston, who provided the graphic design. The finished product, available for \$10, is a commercial-quality package highly recommended for playing at LifeRing meetings and at in-service hours in treatment centers.



We reached another milestone this year with the appearance of the first commercially published book about LifeRing, *Empowering Your Sober Self: The LifeRing Approach to Addiction Recovery*. More than 20 LifeRing participants contributed short testimonials and anecdotes to the book. William L. White, the historian and our popular keynote speaker at the Congress in 2004, contributed the preface. The publisher is Jossey-Bass, a division of the giant John Wiley & Sons publishing empire. We owe particular thanks to the legendary editor Alan Rinzler – he has edited books by Tony Morrison, Tom Robbins, Bob Dylan, Hunter Thompson, Tom Wolfe, John Lennon, and Woody Guthrie, among others – for his initiative and persistence in getting this book launched. This is the first LifeRing book to achieve commercial distribution. It is or will be in bookstores throughout the English-speaking world, and in libraries as well – the keynote review in Library Journal rates it “highly recommended.” We’ve had outstanding responses to the book from some major names in the treatment profession, and strongly positive reactions from LifeRing participants from coast to coast. *Empowering Your Sober Self* is aimed at a wider audience than the *Recovery by Choice* workbook and the *How Was Your Week* handbook. This is a book you can give to any person -- in recovery or not, client or professional -- who wants a comprehensive and easy-to-read book-length introduction to what it's all about.



This past year, we also welcomed Robert Stump, convenor of the Tuesday evening Union City LifeRing, as the new Treasurer, succeeding the outgoing John Bateman. Robert has more than three years clean and sober, is a stable family guy, and is familiar with Microsoft Access, the database we use at the LifeRing Service Center in Oakland to keep track of meetings, book orders, and much else. Welcome, Robert.

As is made clear in the separate Financial Report, we continue to operate on a shoestring. As fiscal year 2008 drew to a close, we became concerned that we might end the year with a cash flow deficit. However, we had a very strong response to our year-end fund appeal, both from the meetings who sent in basket receipts, and from individual donors, and we closed the year with a small but reassuring surplus. The record response was highly reassuring, particularly in view of the difficult economic climate. Thank you, everyone who contributed.

Setbacks of the Past Year

It's with great sadness that we note the passing of Ron Johnson, founding convenor of a Petaluma meeting, and recipient last year of a LifeRing Pioneer award. He died of complications following surgery.

We also noted with regret the demise of the new meeting in Winston-Salem, just four months after its launch. There are a few other meetings on our list whose convenors have not been in touch for some time. Unless we have signs of life from them soon, we are going to assume the worst and take the meetings off.

The Lawyers' LifeRing peer support contract that began two years ago is definitely

off now. The California State Bar is in fiscal crisis mode and there is talk of scrapping the Lawyer Assistance Program, which was our partner in this venture. We continue the Lawyer's LifeRing project on our own, on a much reduced scale.

The study of LifeRing proposed to the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA) by two senior researchers at the Alcohol Research Group (ARG) in Emeryville will not be funded, ARG has learned. There is discussion about revising the proposal and trying again, but money is scarce now and at this point the prospects for this project are not bright. We owe thanks to Sarah Zemore and Lee Kaskutas of ARG for their persistent efforts on this proposal.

Plans for the Coming Year

LifeRing Partners. An initiative long requested by many -- a support group for family and loved ones of addicted persons, based on the LifeRing philosophy -- had its organizing meeting at the '08 Congress, and over the past year managed to produce a draft Statement of Principles. The project awaits a person or core group of persons able to translate those words into a living organization.

Website. A major overhaul of the lifering.org (a/k/a unhooked.com) website still stands before us. We intend to rebuild the website from the ground up on a CMS (Content Management System) platform. 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 exhibited at the NAADAC, CAADAC, and APA conferences this past year, and intend to do so again, resources permitting. If we have the resources, we should expand our exhibits to additional professional conferences. The name recognition is well worth the expense.

Organization

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 top of the discussion agenda at our Sunday morning Delegates’ Assembly this year is a motion to form an Expansion Committee charged with leading an organization-wide discussion and proposing a set of Bylaws amendments for the 2010 Congress, all aimed at expanding the leadership ranks of LifeRing from the present three officers to a larger number.

One part of that process will be choosing a successor CEO. I have held this post since the beginning of the organization, and I intend to pass it on at or before the 2010 Congress. I intend to remain very active on behalf of LifeRing, as author, speaker, and secular evangelist, but it is time for others to take over the executive responsibilities of the LifeRing network.

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,
4/29/09