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The Whys and Hows of Starting a Lawyers Helping Lawyers Group



Why?

There is a real need to assist attorneys, judges, and law school students with difficulties arising from substance abuse, and physical and mental health conditions. In conjunction with the New York State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program, county/borough or other boutique bar associations can establish committees of volunteers to help those who are struggling. In addition, such groups can meet regularly and provide support to each other, learn about and then share local resources, spread awareness, and work on projects that benefit the local legal community and the interests of their clients.



How can I Start a Lawyers Helping Lawyers Group (also known as a Lawyer Assistance Committee)?

NYSBA can help identify some individuals in your area who may be interested and volunteers from established groups/committees can provide guidance. The NYSBA Lawyer Assistance Program Director can also provide support to get a group formed and functioning.

Members could come from any practice setting, some could even be non-lawyers, but all should have knowledge of substance abuse and mental health issues and other issues that may negatively affect the quality of life of legal professionals.

The Basics:

- 1. Bar Association(s) Leadership Involvement:** Bar Presidents can establish committees and can provide essential endorsement of a committee, its importance, and provide infrastructure.
- 2. Time Commitment:** Those involved must devote their time and energy to being involved in a committee which might entail organizing and attending meetings and events, disseminating information, organizing volunteers, and potentially organizing CLEs or other informative presentations.
- 3. Budget:** Having a small budget is helpful in order to provide refreshment, promotional items or printing costs, speaker or venue fees.

Logistics:

- 1. A meeting place:** a Bar Association conference room, a law firm, a restaurant/coffee shop, library, church, other public space-with consideration of the personal matters at hand.
 - 2. Establish a consistent day/time:** ex. the first Tuesday of every month at noon.
 - 3. Food always helps to ensure attendance:** ex. coffee, lunch.
 - 4. Program Promotion:** ex. ad in Bar Association newsletter or on their website, at CLE and social events.
- ## Committee Needs:
- 1. Officers:** Chairperson and secretary.
 - 2. Contact list:** email and regular mail.
 - 3. Meeting structure:** agenda, time limit, a time to share stories, articles, resources, and potential outreach opportunities.
 - 4. Cultivating of volunteers** for 12 step work or mentoring for those who are struggling.

Other ideas:

1. Establish a Lawyers Only 12 Step Meeting.
2. Establish a Lawyers with Depression Support Group.
3. Plan social events that promote recovery and strengthen supportive relationships: ex. holiday party, golf outing, weekend retreat.

