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OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

A JUDGE REACHED OUT TO HELP

I was referred to the attorney assistance program by a judge who noticed that I was having trouble keeping up with a particular case. I had missed a couple of court dates and was having difficulty turning in motions on a timely basis. The particular situation that led to the referral was a panic attack that occurred at the end of a hearing. On a personal level, I was experiencing a tremendous amount of emotional stress due to family difficulties. I was also feeling very depressed. I thought I had everything under control and was surprised when the judge suggested I contact the assistance program.

I'm very grateful that someone cared enough about me to suggest that I seek assistance. I truly believe it saved my legal career. Although I was apprehensive about my first visit, I also felt a sense of relief, in that I felt like I was finally addressing a hidden problem. The initial meeting went well, and it was suggested that I attend a weekly support group meeting.

My life began to turn around the moment I attended my first meeting. I cannot tell you the relief I felt when I saw that I wasn't alone. What was particularly helpful was that all of the attendees were in the legal profession, so they understood the particular stresses that I was under; that is, balancing a challenging professional career and stressful family and personal matters.

Each meeting had a life of its own. Sometimes we focused on career concerns, and other meetings were more personal in nature. I really appreciated the confidential nature of the meetings and that we could freely share our concerns in a group session. Our facilitator was great in that he not only listened, but you could tell he also cared.

Listening to other members share their concerns and having them give input on my circumstance was particularly helpful. The group meetings were a "safe" place where I could open up without fear of judgment. The primary objective was to give us coping tools to handle the difficult situations that life throws at all of us, as well as build our confidence so that we could become productive members of the legal community.

I no longer attend the group sessions on a weekly basis, but I do check in from time to time. It's good to know that when I am feeling stressed, or when I am dealing with a difficult family or work-related matter, I have a place to go to where I am treated with respect and loving kindness. It's sort of like a home to me, but not a dysfunctional one. We are all striving to be our best, and at the assistance program I've found the encouragement and the "I can do it" support system that was lacking in my private life.

I also have a peer mentor, which is someone in the legal profession who you meet with to discuss professional and other matters. After one meeting with my peer support person, I was so motivated. All of my fears about having participated with an attorney assistance program, along with fears that there might be a stigma to that, melted away.

I'm more optimistic about the legal profession than I've been in years. I actually love my job and have started to move forward in a positive direction. I would strongly recommend the assistance program to anyone. Having someone take the time to encourage me to seek assistance was one of the most positive things I've had happen to me. It's good to know that

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there are people out there who care about others. I'm also grateful for my peer mentor who is pointing me in the right direction as I rebuild my career. And most important, I'm grateful to our group facilitator for giving me positive tools for handling stressful situations and to my fellow group members for their love and support.

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The OAAP can help. Call us at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227.