

# LifeRing Secular Recovery

A network of positive support groups for living free of alcohol and other drugs

Fall 2014

## Newsletter

### Processing Robin Williams

*By Chet G, former board member*

I've been trying to process Robin Williams' too untimely suicide...

First, he was an absolute favorite of mine. As a would-be funnyman (I need a guitar in my hands to protect me from ??? but I DO try to be funny in my act), Williams was one of my favorite models. Unattainable but worth striving for...

In addition, one of my absolute favorite influences was also Robin's; Jonathon Winters. I can still do most of Winters' Custer and the Indians bit from my Winters records from memory...

Then, there's the addiction issue. He fought those demons too -- with the same kind of pattern that we have. For that he was also a kindred spirit.

Then there's the depression.

As a long time professional musician, I can identify with the unreality and come-down that "real life" can be after the high one gets while performing...

I was diagnosed as clinically depressed back in '99 when I quit drinking and started fighting a serious felony charge. After a lot of work rebuilding my life and in the beginning stages of effective therapy I

was told by my lawyer that despite all of my work the phony criminal-injustice system was going to lock me up in jail or prison as an "example" (which was going to drain my savings, set back my therapy a BUNCH and cost me my very lucrative job and my job as LifeRing Convenor).

For the 2nd time in my life, I WAS suicidal that afternoon while driving "home" to my lonely hovel on my motorcycle (I chose the brake over the throttle when given a golden opportunity to end it all) and was probably very close to what Robin Williams must have been feeling the other night.

I wish he'd been able to accept help from somewhere or someone.

I wish he'd been able to internalize some of the love that so many of us felt for HIM -- the person that shone through his funny business.

And I take his death as another damn good reason to stay sober.

Within two weeks of my release in 2000, Bill S. dropped "my" meeting back in my lap -- said he was just keeping the seat warm until I was out. I consider convening that meeting at least half of my therapy over the next few years. Cognitive Behavior Therapy and LifeRing convening are a POWERFUL combination...

### Sobriety conquers all

*By Martin Nicolaus*

To have served this organization as founder and its initial CEO has been an honor and a privilege. I am deeply grateful for the support I've received over the years from the LifeRing network.

I get a great warm feeling from seeing the caliber of the people who are taking the lead in serving the organization today. The basic principles of LifeRing address urgent societal needs. A cadre of people with exceptional vision, energy, talent, and endurance has coalesced around these principles. On this basis, the outlook for LifeRing's future is very good.

The time for me to participate in guiding the organization is past. However, I have been asked for my view of the road ahead. Of course, I have no crystal ball, and life has a way of laughing at our best-laid plans. But here it goes.

If you study closely the history of the traditional recovery model, you will learn that the pivotal event in lifting it out of obscurity was its sponsorship by John D. Rockefeller and others among the top one tenth of one per cent of 1940. Three quarters of a century later, that old money is still there but there are also new voices at the pinnacles of economic power who proclaim the creative disruption of old models. While my personal sympathies lie with the 99 per cent, it

may well be that the principles of LifeRing will find resonance among the new one tenth of one per cent who have arisen with the technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

LifeRing has achieved miracles on a shoestring budget, but more money would be a big help. What if LifeRing could afford to fly people in for convenor trainings? What if every delegate to the annual meeting had their expenses covered? What if LifeRing could afford to donate books in quantity to deserving hospitals and institutions? What if LifeRing could afford to pay market-rate honorariums to speakers? What if there were a full time professional staff at the Service Center? What if LifeRing could afford to mount exhibits at every recovery oriented conference? What if there were LifeRing-based treatment centers?

Amounts of money that would barely be rounding errors for some of the newer tech companies would be life-changing for LifeRing.

Not only the elite, but also the base is changing. The so-called millennial generation is, in many ways, more congruent with LifeRing than with the legacy approach.

The millennials are less religion-centered, more pragmatic, more open to innovation than their parents and grandparents. They are also unfortunately still largely seduced by the bait of the alcoholic beverage industry. But when it comes time for them to get unhooked, they will find LifeRing a compatible and effective recovery environment. They will choose LifeRing. LifeRing is in tune with today and tomorrow.

There is every reason to be optimistic. But I would warn against banking on the expectation of miracles. The establishment of a new movement in the healing arts, broadly conceived, is a marathon, not a sprint. I have seen a study that estimates it takes an average of seventeen years between a movement's publication of its manifesto and its recognition as an established trend. As has been said about progress in science in the universities, progress in healing institutions moves forward one funeral at a time.

For this reason, I sing the praises of tenacity. Energy, talent, brilliance, creativity are all important; we could not do without them. But the secret of success in the long term is just showing up. When treatment programs ask for alternative meetings, LifeRing needs to be there. When speakers are asked for, LifeRing needs to be there. When meetings are on the meeting list, the convenors need to be there. When journalists approach, LifeRing needs to respond. Where there are committees, conferences, and councils with an interest in addiction and recovery issues, LifeRing needs to show up. Tipping points, where an organization suddenly becomes well lit and magnetic, occur from the accumulation of countless small impressions.

It almost goes without saying, but bears emphasis nevertheless, that in order to go the distance, LifeRing needs to stay united. There is no shame in adopting from the older groups the truth that principles are above personalities. Groups survive when its members practice the arts of encouragement, respect, civility, and negotiation;

groups corrode and die when they practice manipulation, control, insult, and intimidation. These guidelines are all the more important when groups rely heavily on online communications.

But the most important quality for the success of LifeRing is personal sobriety. None of the work that has gone into establishing and growing this organization would have been possible without sobriety. The measure of credibility that LifeRing has earned with the treatment profession is based on the reality that what we do has helped us stay clean and sober. If we ever forget this basic truth, LifeRing will be swept away and forgotten. But if we demonstrate in our own lives, and in the lives of our friends and families, that the LifeRing way works for us, that LifeRing is the gateway to a new and sober life, then nothing can stop us. Sobriety silences all critics. Sobriety opens all doors. Sobriety conquers all.

## LifeRing 2014 Conference Video

We have posted a new Blog, "2014 LifeRing Conference Video". Below is a link to a fantastic video compilation high-lighting the 2014 LifeRing Conference, held earlier this year in Santa Rosa, California.

Byron Kerr, one of the Conference's main organizers, says on the genesis of the video and help from others in getting it, and the Conference off the ground: "The entire 2014 LifeRing Conference in Santa Rosa was a team effort."

You can view this post at <http://lifering.org/2014/08/2014-lifering-conference-video/>

In addition to this video, also check out LifeRing's YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/LifeRingVideos>

## September is National Recovery Month

Throughout the month of September there will be local events near all of us celebrating September as National Recovery Month. Check with your local Behavioral Health Department of your local city or county for details.

You may also find local events by starting at the SAMHSA website, <http://recoverymonth.gov/Community-Events/Find-An-Event.aspx>

You may find picnics, barbecues, recovery walks, bike rides, festivals, and talks. By visiting and possibly participating in these events we can help increase awareness of LifeRing in our local communities. In the past, these events have been the exclusive domain of the predominant support community. There is no reason for LifeRing to avoid participation in these events. Many, if not most of the events are sponsored by your local governments.

Events may be titled "Recovery Happens" or some other similar name. Participating in National Recovery Month can only help LifeRing and we will have a booth with literature and books for sale at the *Recovery Walk* event in Martinez, California on Saturday September 20.

## LifeRing has a new Board

We are very pleased to announce that Emily Marcus and Dan Carrigan have been elected as our two new board members as of July 13, 2014.

Emily studied journalism and media criticism and has worked professionally as a writer, editor, and literary agent. She brings her communication skills, motivation, and enthusiasm to further promote LifeRing's public awareness and growth. She has been an active LifeRing convenor for three years and is very much aware of the challenges facing all convenors. As such, she is anxious to bring new and creative ideas in meeting design and group participation.

Dan has been a LifeRing convenor and coordinator in the Bay Area for a number of years. He has served on state and national recovery groups to obtain grants for public policy goals. He is skilled in working cooperatively to achieve outcome commonalities, especially in the presence of differing opinions. Accordingly, his grant experience will be especially valuable. He strongly supports choice of recovery treatment options and is anxious to sustain and expand LifeRing's presence for more people.

## How's Business?

*By Craig Whalley*

A couple of weeks ago I asked other convenors how their meetings were going and if there were signs of growth. The results were anecdotal, of course, and don't 'prove' anything, but most who responded were seeing growth ranging from limited to impressive. This is in keeping with the experience of the Service Center. In the last two days I've sent out three starter kits for new convenors, with another one going out tomorrow. That kind of uptick is unheard of. I started coming to the office every day instead of three days a week just a short time ago mostly because it made for a nice stable routine for me and gave me the office to use to keep up with other LifeRing duties. But sending out books is now close to actually requiring daily attention. Every day there are at least one or two, and most days there are 3 or more, with one day a week or so producing 6+ orders. It used to be that coming in three days a week often saw 0-2 orders over a two day span.

Meanwhile, LSRsafe, which I convene, has had an uptick in new members and is producing so many emails that I have resorted to skimming most of them. That Chat room is booming. Additions to the convenors email group have been increasing as well. ePals, our program for newcomers looking for information, is busier than ever.

The numbers are not huge, but they clearly represent real growth. And insofar as we, a few years ago, were handling things nicely and had time to explore improvements that would attract more members, we are now very pressed to keep up with the daily work. Some people over the years have complained that we haven't been growing fast enough -

- but it seems clear to me that we are now growing as fast as we can accommodate. Njon, our new board chair, has ideas for improving our "professionalism" and attracting more help from the membership by creating discreet tasks that a new volunteer can learn and take on. This will happen none too soon.

We do a lot of different things to try to spread the word about LifeRing. Something we're doing is working! As mentioned, this is all anecdotal rather than documented (except for book sales, for which precise figures exist), but Robert and I at the Service Center are either getting old and slow faster than we thought, or there's more to do than ever.

## What's it worth, your Sobriety?

*By Carola Ziermann, editor*

Kaye Rossi, PhD, was a psychologist and addiction counselor at the Center for Recovery at John Muir/Mount Diablo Hospital in Concord, CA. She passed away a few years ago, way too early, when she was just 52.

I will never forget her. Kaye was pro-LifeRing and I actually first heard about LifeRing through her. She was very open-minded and she must have read each and every book ever written on addiction. We once asked her to be on our Advisory Board. Some of you LifeRing members may have known her, too.

I first met Kaye when I checked into the CFR alcohol treatment program about 12 years ago. She had a great impact on me and my recovery. I joined her after-care-group, however, I dropped out after a year since I thought I could recover on my own without any group support. I relapsed shortly after and called Kaye the very next day. "I'm glad you called..." she said and pointed me into the right direction - I rejoined her after-care-group and went to LifeRing meetings. Now, 10 ½ years later, I am a board member and lead weekly meetings where I sometimes quote from Kaye's insights. I'd like to share this one:

In one of her group sessions, a young man who was going to go on a safari trip to Africa soon, expressed his concern about possibly being triggered to relapse when gathering around the campfire. "Use your cellphone and call somebody" was the advice he got from a group member and he replied: "At \$3.00 per minute, that's expensive!" Kaye simply asked him: "So, what's it worth - your sobriety?"

That stuck in my mind.

A couple of years later, around dinner time, I got upset about my mother-in-law and while looking at the worn-out, hand-us-down rug under our dining room table that she had given us, I was seriously contemplating getting drunk. "What's it worth - your sobriety?" I remembered and instead, I asked my daughter to come with me that evening to buy a new rug. We did.

I never buy on impulse, and this one cost me \$450.00. Was it worth it?

Absolutely, Kaye!

## New LifeRing Meeting in Arcata, CA

We are pleased to announce a new meeting in Arcata, California, as featured in the Mad River Union.com article *Ungodly alternative to AA available in Arcata*.

Read it here: <http://lifering.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Ungodly-alternative-to-AA.pdf>

The meeting is Fridays at 6:30 pm at the Full Circle Center for Integrated Medicine, 4641 Valley East Blvd. Suite 2, Arcata, CA 95521

Also, check out LifeRing Humboldt's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HumboldtsLifeRing>

## New Dual Diagnosis Meeting Online

The Dual Recovery meeting addresses issues regarding sobriety and mental health issues. It is on Thursdays at 5:00 pm PST in our chatroom.

If you haven't registered for chat, it is a very easy process, and will pop up the first time you go to the chatroom webpage. There is a separate room for the Dual Recovery Meeting, please look for it when you first log in.

The chat address is: <http://lifering.org/chat-room/>  
Email Heather, the convenor, directly at [winsteadh@yahoo.com](mailto:winsteadh@yahoo.com) if you have any questions.

## LifeRing Board Member appointed to AOD Advisory Board in Contra Costa

LifeRing's treasurer and board member Carola Ziermann has been appointed to the Contra Costa County Advisory Board on Alcohol and Other Drugs, effective August 27. Carola sees this as a breakthrough, personally and for our organization, as it will have an impact in raising public awareness about LifeRing and choice in recovery.

Most counties have advisory boards to the government. They are local entities whose meetings are open to the public and they are an excellent way to get to know people in the local recovery scene. You may meet many folks from local government as well as many 12-Step activists.

If you're interested, contact your local advisory board on alcohol and drugs and try attending just one meeting of your county's advisory board. Folks will get to know us better.

## Come Out, Come Out, Whatever you are...

By Njon Weinroth

My name is Njon, and I'm an Alcoholic. Depending on my "audience", sometimes I'll be an Addict, or a Person in Recovery. Sometimes I'm a Recovered Addict or a Person Who Dealt With Issues Concerning Addiction. Regardless of the semantics used to describe me, I know who I am and

what my experience has been. I use these descriptors to help others understand where I've come from and where I am now, in terms that they can easily understand.

As a small number of people, world-wide, who have been lucky enough to have found a program that is compatible to our secular beliefs, I feel like we owe it to those who have not, to be all the more visible and accessible to society in general. We owe this even more so, to those seeking what we have found. Your "coming out" can help many others find their choice in a recovery network that meets their needs as opposed to them trying to adapt to what they think of as the only solution.

I'd LOVE to turn on the TV and for once, see a character face recovery with the bravery and joy that I see in our meetings. I'm so sick of seeing caricatures of us in angry rows or circles, in dark, smoky church basements with bad coffee, dramatic horror stories, and the obligatory crying. I hate it that this has become the face of recovery in our society.

I see many people from other organizations active in social networks on addiction issues on Facebook and on LinkedIn. I'd love to see more representation of people with a Secular Recovery background. We need you out there spreading the truth about us and letting folks know we exist. Recovery does not have to be the miserable lifestyle it's portrayed as, in the minds of so many. I'd urge you to connect with any appropriate public forum offering support for addiction and related issues. All this said, I respect your choice to retain your anonymity if being "out" in your personal or professional life could cause some hardship or unwanted attention.

Here are some links to some recovery focused social networks ☺

Secular Recovery on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/SecularRecovery>

Addiction Professionals on LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=862107&trk=anet Ug hm>

Once you've shared with a few people, just like sharing in meetings, it really gets easier. Good luck!

## Book Review

### *The Noonday Demon:*

### *An Atlas of Depression* by Andrew Solomon

*The Noonday Demon* examines depression in personal, cultural, and scientific terms.

Drawing on his own struggles with the illness and interviews with fellow sufferers, doctors and scientists, policy makers and politicians, drug designers and philosophers, Andrew Solomon reveals the subtle complexities and sheer agony of the disease. He confronts the challenge of defining the illness and describes the vast range of available medications, the efficacy of alternative treatments, and the impact the malady has on various



demographic populations -- around the world and throughout history. He also explores the thorny patch of moral and ethical questions posed by emerging biological explanations for mental illness. With uncommon humanity, candor, wit, and erudition, award-winning author Solomon takes readers on a journey of incomparable range and resonance into the most pervasive of family secrets. His contribution to our understanding not only of mental illness but also of the human condition is truly stunning.

This is not a self-help book, yet it may be very helpful for people during a dark period.

## LifeRing Predator Policy

LifeRing does not condone predatory behaviors of any sort in our on-line and face-to-face communities. While such behavior is rare, it jeopardizes the safe and supportive environment LifeRing seeks to establish for all our meetings and discussions.

Predatory behavior may include:

- sexual harassment
- sexual attack
- borrowing money
- selling goods for personal gain
- offering investment schemes
- theft of meeting funds.

It is important to deal with such situations before they escalate. If a LifeRing participant feels he or she is a victim of predatory behavior, he or she should immediately discuss the matter privately -- and as soon as possible -- with the convenor, the Service Center, a member of the Board of Directors, or a member of the Executive Committee.

Depending on the circumstances, the convenor may decide to talk with the person suspected of preying on others in a public setting of some sort (restaurant, coffee shop, or other public meeting place) to hear their side of the story; to contact the Service Center for advice and counsel; or, if the offense is likely a criminal one or has the potential to escalate violently, to contact local law enforcement authorities immediately. At no time should LifeRing group members use violence or other inappropriate action in an attempt to solve the issue.

Convenors are urged to immediately contact the Service Center or the LifeRing Board of Directors if they believe there is a predatory issue of any kind occurring, or possibly brewing, in their meeting environment.

Individuals suspected of engaging in predatory behavior may be barred from attending LifeRing online and f2f-meetings. This is a decision that is made with the convenor in consultation with the Board of Directors and Executive Committee and is handled on a case-by-case basis.

All of us in LifeRing have an obligation to protect the safe environment of our on-line and face-to-face meetings if we are to support our members in attaining and maintaining a sober, secular, and self-empowered life.

## LifeRing Online: Reaching out to the World

*By Craig Whalley*

In addition to its growing number of face-to-face (f2f) meetings, LifeRing continues to offer online support to members from around the world. Several different venues are available, each offering support and information but each with a somewhat different approach. People differ in how they best interact online, and we try to offer something for anyone who is unable to attend our f2f meetings, or who want to add to the f2f experience, or who prefer the online approach.

Our oldest online venue were email groups. LSRmail began in the late 1990's with members tacking one another's names onto each email, so that all received a copy. This type of group communication became popular as the Internet grew and is now much easier and more reliable.

Most of the LifeRing groups are offered through Yahoo.com's facilities. All are "private," meaning members have to be approved for joining (almost automatic unless you're obviously a spammer).

Messages are archived on Yahoo servers but are closed to non-members and cannot be explored by search engines.

Over 500 people are signed up for the two general sobriety support email groups, LSRsafe and LSRmail, (although the number of active posters is a fraction of that) and several more specialized groups are also available, including some aimed at providing contacts between convenors, and one for people interested in LifeRing governance issues. The support groups have exchanged tens of thousands of messages over the years and yet they manage to have the feel of a group of friends getting together regularly to exchange experiences, victories and failures.

The LifeRing Forum shares some characteristics with the email groups, but it is Internet-based, so it's messages are available for all to see (which is why screen names replace real names for most members). Messages to the Forum are organized into different "threads" so that older messages remain available and easily accessible (email groups retain older messages, but exploring them can be a daunting process at first but soon becomes easy). The LifeRing Forum offers members the chance to maintain their own sobriety journals, available to be read by others. These can be particularly helpful to newcomers who can explore how the recovery process has worked for others.

Another option is our Chat Room. Until recently, this was an entirely text-based venue, essentially a group instant-messaging facility. The rooms are open at all times so that people can meet and talk about sobriety issues or how their lives are going in general or just get to know each other. But there are also regularly scheduled meetings, usually structured much like a regular LifeRing f2f meeting, where each person who attends gets to "talk" about how their effort to get and stay clean and sober is going.

Chat is open to the Internet – anyone can visit the chat rooms with a simple registration procedure – so screen names are generally used rather than real names. There also is “voice chat”, which allows members to talk instead of typing, if they have the necessary microphone and headphone or speakers capability. For those who are poor typists, this is a major step forward!

Also, there is the LifeRing Ning social networking site. Patterned after Facebook, this allows members to construct personal pages including photos, communicate directly with other members or to the group as a whole, maintain their own blog and generally feel a part of a recovery community. The general rise of social networking has been reflected in the popularity of the Lifering site, which has well over 1,000 members.

Finally, LifeRing offers the “e-mail pals” program. This aims not at group support but rather one-on-one communication between a newcomer and a LifeRing volunteer. Many people are reluctant to join any group and getting an “e-pal” can be a great first step towards recovery. The newcomer writes in and an effort is made to match him or her with an appropriate volunteer who then offers both support and information about LifeRing and about the recovery process.

People from around the world participate in LifeRing Online – Japan, Ireland, South Africa, England, Australia, Tasmania and more are represented along with many, many North Americans. LifeRing Online can be a very, very valuable part of the recovery process.

## Want to subscribe to the LifeRing Newsletter?

The LifeRing Newsletter is a quarterly publication with news about LifeRing and what its members are doing to promote the LifeRing “experience”.

If you’d like to receive our Newsletter by email, please send an email to [service@lifering.org](mailto:service@lifering.org), Subject: newsletter, with your name and email address.

## LifeRing Metrics

*By Robert Stump, Executive Director*

I would like to introduce the reader to a new service in this newsletter. I’m going to title it “LifeRing Metrics”. I’m going to try to post graphs and statistics in each of the newsletters to follow. These metrics will be updated and changed as necessary to reflect different areas of growth for our organization. We are small, very small, in the big picture of recovery in the United States and the rest of the world, but as you can see growth is happening. Every year LifeRing gets a little bigger in one measurement or another.

This month, we are measuring growth in these three key areas:

## Meet a LifeRinger

Who are these people in LifeRing? Here’s another story, excerpt from the book *Empowering Your Sober Self – The LifeRing Approach to Addiction Recovery* by Martin Nicolaus.

## Spending Time with Sober People

My drug of choice was crystal methamphetamine. I started using when I was seventeen years old. After many twists and turns I ended up awaiting trial on a felony. My lawyer suggested I enroll in a drug program voluntarily before the state enrolled me involuntarily.

At the beginning, I was not really feeling it. The program I was in required two self-help meetings per week. We were given the option of AA, NA, or LifeRing.

LifeRing quickly became my only self-help group. The people at LifeRing turned out to be very similar to me. We were all mostly lost, confused, and looking for answers and help. Part of the problem is that we don’t always know the questions we are seeking answers to. With the open format, we can work with the group to achieve what we are seeking.

These meetings are not advice sessions or “you must do this to succeed” meetings. They are an open format, dedicated to sharing with others what has and has not worked for us. This includes our weekly struggles, triggers, and cravings as well as how we handled them or didn’t. If someone relapses, we still love them and hope they learned something and hopefully they will share that with us.

One of the changes that the meetings help me make is spending time with sober people doing sober things. This is huge for me, as my most damaging use was brought on directly by loneliness. I am very introverted and making friends and lasting relationships is difficult at best. These meetings help with both of these issues.

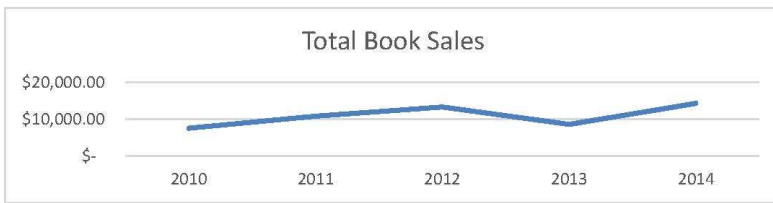
As I write, I have three years, six months, sixteen days clean. I work a total abstinence program.

*M.B., Union City, California*

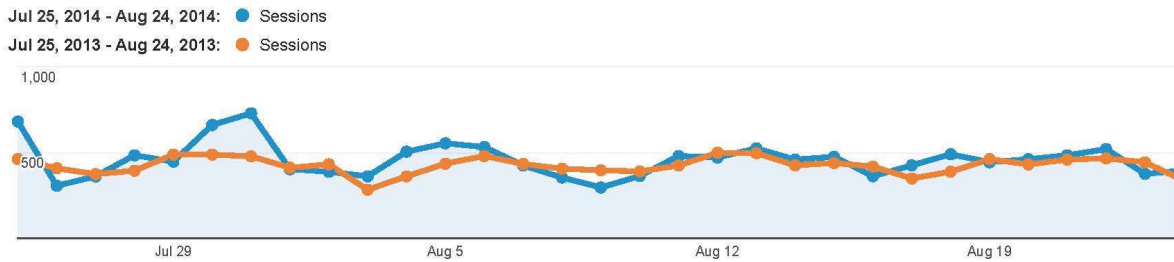
**1. New f2f meeting starts – Years not listed had 0 meetings**



**2. Book sales - 2010 to 2014**



**3. Internet traffic – Last month and one year ago**



There is growth, though it is mixed. I've been at the Service Center for three years and 9 months now and I have seen growth in the phone calls, email inquiries, and even hand carried mail. Our annual income and receipts have increased, our bank account meets our needs, and the LifeRing message is heard in more and more places in the greater recovery community.



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