



LifeRing Secular Recovery

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

Fall 2012

Newsletter

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). 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. A very recent innovation is the use of "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.

LifeRing in the News

Mountain Vista Farm

by Byron Kerr

There is a new meeting at Mountain Vista Farm in Glen Ellen, California (Mondays, 3020 Warm Springs Rd, Glen Ellen). MVF invited us to start the meetings and after much discussion and some agreement to disagree, the inaugural LifeRing Secular Recovery meeting at Mountain Vista Farm took place on Monday, August 27. It was attended by about 15 of the 30 residents and two people from outside MVF. I gave a short presentation about LifeRing at the beginning of the meeting including some Q&A. We then proceeded to use the standard "How Was Your Week" format for a LifeRing meeting. One of the outside attendees was a LifeRing convenor from the Kaiser Oakland CDRP program. It was great to have another "LifeRinger" there.

The staff at Mountain Vista Farm was completely welcoming. They offered any and all support necessary to set up for the meeting and were very helpful. This new relationship appears to have a very positive beginning.

Marty Nicolaus actually paved the way. He spoke to them 3+ years ago and they recently approached us. It's a lesson in persistence. The door that you knock on today may not open for years. If you never knock on the door, it will never open.

What's Up With LifeRing?

I spent a good bit of this morning educating myself about **LifeRing** after reading a post over at The Fix entitled Can You OD on AA?, a great article by one of their ...

by *Screedler* on August 21, 2012

<http://discoveringalcoholic.com/alcoholism/whats-up-with-lifering>

Step by Step

When Sonoma County's courts sentence alcohol and drug offenders to rehab, a nonreligious option hasn't always been clear - until one man's crusade to change the process. by

Leilani Clark

<http://www.bohemian.com/northbay/step-by-step/Content?oid=2305383>

Let's celebrate!

LifeRing Co-founder, long-time CEO, Board Chairman and author **Martin Nicolaus** celebrates 20 years of being clean and sober in secular recovery. Congratulations, Marty!

Peer Support

For several years, LifeRing has offered an opportunity to be connected by email with a volunteer for one-to-one support, information and friendship. A newcomer sees it listed as an online option and emails us -- we pass on the request to the group of volunteers and one of them offers to respond. It can be frustrating for our volunteers -- the newcomer is often very tentative about the whole recovery process and the disappearance rate is high, which leaves our volunteers thinking they somehow drove the person away. But for some people, it works very well -- people who are reluctant to join a group of any kind or who feel particularly vulnerable and fragile. And, of course, for people who know pretty much nothing about LifeRing and are just exploring.

I have been working on ways to expand the concept by reaching out to website commentators and book purchasers. I view this sort of one-to-one outreach as very important -- not only for the newcomer who is drawn in to recovery but also for our volunteer who, when it works, gains a great deal of satisfaction.

If you would like to join our group of volunteers just let me know and I'll sign you up. It's sometimes hard to find a volunteer and too much of the work falls on too few shoulders, so we'd love to have you.

Craig Whalley

From the Executive Director

My name is Robert Stump and I am the Executive Director of LifeRing Secular Recovery LSR). I'm a male, in reasonably good health, soon to be 60 years old (October 31 is my birthday) and I have over six years sobriety from alcohol. I had the privilege of being asked to assume the executive directorship role by the Board of Directors (BOD) at the last LifeRing Congress in May. In this role I work closely with the BOD to implement board policy and to suggest directions and planning for the coming year.

As Executive Director, I see two needs in LifeRing; promote the growth of LifeRing meetings and to find money to fuel this growth. We have 163 meetings in the world. LifeRing is adding one to two meetings a month and from the calls and emails we get, the world needs more LifeRing meetings. The Outreach Committee, led by the hard working Board Member and past Executive Director Kathleen Gargan, is trying to encourage this growth in three different ways:

1. **by contacting treatment centers in key cities where new meetings are starting** - mailings are sent with an introductory letter and LifeRing literature. Follow-up phone calls are made a few weeks later by volunteers asking if the letters were received, questions about LifeRing are answered and, if applicable, a list of meetings in the area is provided.

2. **by contacting key professionals in the recovery field** - packages are sent with an introductory letter, the LifeRing books "Empowering Your Sober Self" and the "Workbook" and selected brochures. As above, follow-up phone calls are made a few weeks later by volunteers asking if the packages were received and answering questions about LifeRing.
3. **by maintaining a Prospective Convenor Spreadsheet** - a list is kept that identifies all the people who have expressed a desire to convene a LifeRing meeting in their locality. The Outreach Committee does all it can to help these individuals create a successful LifeRing meeting in their area.

The sweat and toil of these volunteers can only do so much. Mailings, free books and postal fees cost money. With the limited funds that LifeRing possesses it is sometimes challenging to pay for all the things that need to be done. Please help us out with a donation.

Office Manager

In addition to being the Executive Director, I'm also the office manager of the LifeRing Service Center. During the last four years, I've been involved in LifeRing, in one capacity or another, helping to do what needs to be done to keep the organization up and running. I worked with Marty, before he retired, for about a year looking over his shoulder seeing how some of the essential activities were accomplished at the center.

Since January 1st 2012, I've been in the LifeRing Service Center office handling the day to day operations of LifeRing including answering emails and phone calls, maintaining the contact and meeting databases, keeping track of book sales and donations, fundraising, etc..., all the things needed to keep LifeRing going.

The only thing I'm not involved with is the bookstore. We have an active bookstore where people from all over the world order LifeRing publications. This operation is managed by Craig Whalley. Craig (a former book store owner) handles the shipping of all the book orders that come into the center.

Office hours (Robert and Craig)

I'm in the office three days a week, Monday and Wednesday in the afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00 pm and on Friday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Craig Whalley, our bookstore guru, is in the office in the morning, four days a week (except Wednesdays) for a few hours each of these days. If you're planning to come down to visit, please call first to make sure the office is open.

Phone: 800-811-4142; Email: service@lifering.org

Donations

By check: LifeRing Service Center,
1440 Broadway, Suite 312, Oakland, CA 94612-2023
By credit card online: go to www.lifering.org/donate/
Tax deductible. We are a non-profit corporation 501(c)(3)
Questions? Please call us toll-free at 800.811.4142 or email us at service@lifering.org
Thank you for your support of LifeRing Secular Recovery!

What about Lifering?

by Carola Ziermann, editor

I recently joined the Facebook community. I went through a bitter divorce last year and my daughter and I had become estranged in the process. She is now in college and I thought Facebook may be a way to get in touch with her. So, I started my profile page and really put some thought into what I would like to have displayed there. Foremost, my daughter will see it and probably show it to her friends. And she wouldn't like it if it's boring or artificial or even embarrassing for her. After answering my 'personals' truthfully, there was the question about people I admire. Nelson Mandela came to mind. Who else?

Christopher Hitchens, a journalist and atheist. Ok, anyone local? Yes! Marty Nicolaus. Not only is he a great role model for me, he is also a personal friend of mine.

Next question: What organizations do you support? I love animals and my daughter volunteered at animal shelters for years while in high school and we adopted a bird and a dog. So this one is easy: Humane Society, ASPCA, German Shepherd Rescue. When typing the organization's name, a logo pops up with a number indicating how many other people support this particular organization.

Anything else that is dear to me? What about LifeRing? I'm with LifeRing for more than eight years as a member and convenor and I am on the board for the last five years. Shouldn't I mention it on my Facebook page? Now that's a tough one - or is it? All I want is that my daughter be proud of her mom. I remember there was a time when she was, and it was in part because I was involved in LifeRing.

So, I decided to take a stand and put LifeRing in. A logo for LifeRing popped up, showing only 57 people supporting it. That's it? There are 900 million Facebook users. And people on Facebook who like LifeRing Secular Recovery: 57
LifeRing Oakland: 81
LifeRing Ireland: 32
LifeRing Canada: 486

I was shocked when I saw this. So I clicked on AA just to compare:

Alcoholics Anonymous: 69,251 people like it,
AA (Big Book): 1,562
AA Birmingham UK: 7,998

Given that LifeRing has a strong online presence, I suppose many of our members have a Facebook page. So either they don't want to show their affiliation with us - or do we simply have to realize that the LifeRing community is a very small one and there are not that many people out there for which the LifeRing way works best?

I don't think so. Please take a stand.

My daughter became my friend on Facebook.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

At LifeRing's Annual Meeting this year in San Francisco, it was mandated that the board establish a committee on absentee voting. Like my namesake I seek freedom via democracy. I need to say this:

Members of LifeRing make a common vow to free themselves of their addictions with the support of others in their meeting group. Then and there the powers of their hearts and minds are employed to help others gain the power to become sober. This process does not attempt to replace the member's power or the addiction with belief in some higher power.

We are each free to make thoughtful vows in the context of a well-run group meeting. The word "vote" takes its meaning from the word "vow". The American philosopher John Dewey wrote "We naturally associate democracy ... with freedom of action, but freedom of action without freedom of thought behind it is only chaos." Would a LifeRing absentee plebiscite seeking world-wide direction for the organization's future action help our members?

What positive outcome might we expect? The only good outcome I can imagine would be the pleasant sensation of democracy – the feelings of civic virtue that often come from the act of voting itself. The rest would be chaos.

Yours in truth,

Sam Adams

Dear Editor,

Before Lifering was well known at the Oakland Kaiser Chemical Dependency Recovery Program (or anywhere else for that matter), Marty N, yours truly and many other Lifering members presented Lifering to Kaiser's clients as part of the CDRP's regular education program.

In those early days when the only thing most folks knew was AA and its jargon, the subject of sponsorship often came up, usually in the form of "How can you have a recovery program without Sponsors?" Marty formulated a beautiful answer, "We're the one step program; 'Don't Drink or Use No Matter What!'" He would then add, "And what part of 'Don't Drink or Use No Matter What!' do you need a 'sponsor' to explain to you?"

Personally, I consider the sponsor one of the more negative aspects of AA. To not only allow but PROMOTE or DEMAND that self-appointed, untrained, (essentially ignorant) lay drunks/addicts micro-manage another sufferer's life is not only dangerous but in many cases counter-productive. From what I've heard, many sponsor's one-size-fits-YOU approach often drives members to drink.

From the beginning in Lifering, we have been very clear in describing the process as positive, proactive, ME-centered peer-group support. We DON'T TELL OTHERS how they should do their recovery in our meetings.

Instead we describe actions and thoughts that have helped us with our own recovery so that other members can pick and choose what they feel would be useful for their own little-p program.

Exchanging phone numbers in order to provide peer support in times of need, to go out to dinner or lunch or to a ball game, in other words, FORMING friendships with other members, that's fine!

Be fellow addicts/drunks/sufferers, sure.

Friends, DEFINITELY.

But SPONSORS or Mentors -- Nope, don't need them.

Chet G,

Lifering Member since 1999, in response to question about having "Mentors" in LifeRing.

We would like to hear from you.

Please send questions, letters, suggestions for our newsletter to the editor at: service@lifering.org

Book Review

New Book on Addictions, Drugs, and Drug Policy

by Joseph Mott

I just read David Nutt's new book, "Drugs without the Hot Air: Minimizing the Harms of Legal and Illegal Drugs". The book is very informative, and perhaps overall one of the best books I've read on drugs and drug policy. The author occasionally sounds a little too cozy with BigPharma for my taste, but I think many people will find lots of good information and perspective here. It's also well-footnoted.

For a more comprehensive review, go to our website www.lifering.org or click on this link: <http://lifering.org/2012/09/if-alcohol-were-discovered-today-would-it-be-legal/>

Meet a LifeRinger

Here, we publish excerpts from the book "Empowering Your Sober Self - The LifeRing Approach to Addiction Recovery" by Martin Nicolaus.

Staying Sober My Way

LifeRing doesn't require me to label myself in any way. I did not have to say "my name is" and I did not have to say "I am" anything.

As it states on the Website, LifeRing "welcomes people regardless of their faith or lack of it." I am a Christian. I feel very comfortable with LifeRing. LifeRing did not expect me to believe or not believe in anything. My personal beliefs

are my own business, and I like the way that LifeRing allows me to keep my privacy.

I can be as anonymous as I choose to be. And that helps me to feel safe. I like that.

I got practical support. I learned ways of increasing my coping skills. I received caring feedback. Without anyone expecting that I “had to” take their advice. I could make up my own mind about what parts to use or disregard. To choose what would work for me. So I could figure out the best way for me to stay sober.

And I emphasize – for me. Not for everybody else. There was no “one way.” The assumption seemed to be that each

person was unique, and what worked for one person may or may not work for someone else.

I have used the LifeRing online resources – the discussion forum, the e-mail lists and the chats – as my primary means of support to stay sober. I like the fact that I don’t have to travel to a meeting. I can sit at home (even in my pajamas!) and get online sobriety support anytime, day or night, by simply typing on my computer. It’s great!

I have been free from alcohol dependency for over seven years now. That feels good. LifeRing works for me.
Gal, Seattle, Washington

If you’d like to find out more about the people in LifeRing, please read “Empowering Your Sober Self” by Martin Nicolaus.

Convenors’ Corner

Convenors, this is your page! We’d like to hear from you and have an exchange of ideas.

How to start a meeting?

How to get attendance to your meeting?

Convening advice..?

Please write to us with your questions, experiences or concerns.

Email: service@lifering.org.

A frequent question is:

What do you do when someone in your meeting simply would not stop talking and is also giving lots of "you should" kind of advice?

Here's what board member Joe Mott recommends:

I think the key here is to realize that your primary role as a convenor is to create and maintain a safe space that is conducive for the kind of communication that the meeting is intended to foster. The welfare of the group and the overall process is more important than any one individual's feelings -- even YOURS.

So although it may be uncomfortable to feel like an "enforcer," or "the bad guy," it's actually a very important function. It's not something you do out of spite or anger, but rather out of necessity. There's never any need to get angry or upset, or frustrated, particularly if you've already thought the scenario through and have a plan.

Because there are lots of folks who are dealing with BOTH psychiatric issues AND addiction issues, it's certainly not unheard of to encounter a disruptive person in a LifeRing group. Sometimes a person is just psychotic, and has not been taking his or her medications; or worse, perhaps they're not getting adequate medical attention in the first place. Either way, it's not their fault and anger has no place in responding to their disruptive behavior.

A good initial approach would be to interrupt, and redirect. If necessary, reiterate whatever elements of the group process the individual hasn't internalized yet. Set boundaries and expectations, and explain why it's important to do things the way we do. Usually this will work, in my limited experience.

But other times, it will NOT be enough because the individual will not be in a place to hear what you're saying, or not in enough control (or with enough insight) to manage their own behavior. In that case, you have to have a plan for removing the person from group. In most public places, there will be a proprietor, or manager, or security person who can help you usher the person from the meeting with not a whole lot of disruption.

I hope that gives you a starting point for working out your own approach!

Hook up with others – who’ve been there – online or in person.

Find your path to freedom from alcohol and other drugs.

Go to www.lifering.org

Opening Statement

Following is a sample opening statement for a LifeRing meeting. Feel free to use it as is or edit it to your meeting's needs. I, for instance, like to skip the part about "If you are under the influence..." as I find it inappropriate to the members of my group who I know for years – sober. However, some meetings, in particular at treatment facilities and with frequent newcomers, may want to leave this note in. You may also want to give a warm welcome to newcomers with "If this is your first time at this meeting of LifeRing -- Welcome."

Welcome to our meeting of LifeRing Secular Recovery.
LifeRing is a self-help support group for all people who want to get and stay clean and sober.

We feel that in order to remain in recovery, we have to make sobriety the top priority in our lives. By sobriety, we mean complete abstinence from alcohol and other addictive drugs.

Out of respect for people of all faiths and none, we conduct our meetings in a secular way, which means that, during this hour, we do not use prayer or talk about religion. We rely in our recovery on our own efforts and on the help of the group members and other friends.

Everything that we share at this meeting is completely confidential and stays in this room. If you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs now, we ask that you maintain silence at this meeting. You may speak with members afterward.

The meeting format is flexible. We generally begin by checking in and talking about our past week in recovery. Next we focus on what we plan to do to stay clean and sober in the coming week. Please introduce yourself by your first name. If you would like, also tell us how long you have been in recovery.

We encourage cross-talk throughout the meeting. By cross-talk we mean questions and positive, supportive feedback. Positive experiences from your own recovery are welcome. Please allow enough time for everyone to participate by limiting your speaking time.



LifeRing Secular Recovery
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www.lifering.org

We are a non-profit corporation 501(c)(3)
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