

# Lighthouse Plan to Be a Beacon of Hope

by Gordon Hickey

Lawyers Helping Lawyers is in many ways like a stone skipping over a pond. It makes its mark where it hits, but the pond is very large.

For almost all of its thirty years, LHL has been a one-man show run by James E. Leffler. He has been the executive director, clinician, spokesman, bookkeeper, counselor, and office manager. Recently, LHL hired Tim Carroll as part-time executive director.

That move allowed Leffler to concentrate on being clinical director.

The mission of LHL, though, remains large, and it remains an organization centered in Richmond. But Carroll has come up with a plan — the Lighthouse Plan — to expand and enhance the geographic reach of the agency and bring its services to the clients wherever they are in Virginia.

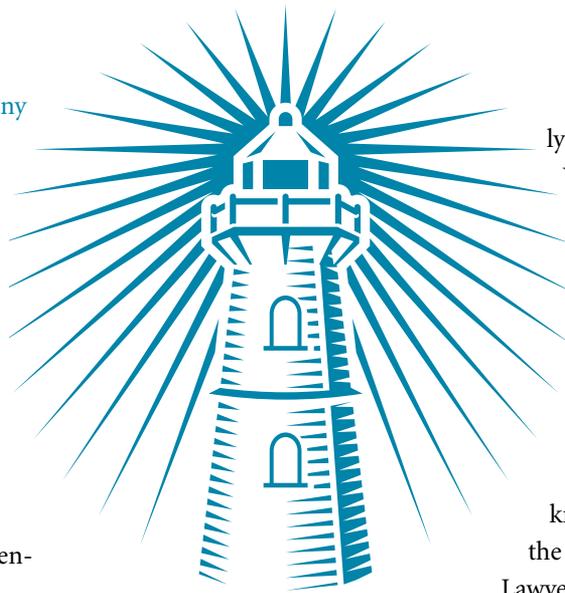
Out of about 50,000 legal professionals in Virginia, LHL estimates that nearly 10,000 overuse alcohol and 14,000 are depressed. The 2014–15 study of licensed lawyers done by the ABA and Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation found that 20.6 percent of respondents reported problematic use of alcohol, 28 percent indicated they suffer from depression, and 19 percent said they struggle with anxiety.

Those statistics are gigantic when compared with the general population, where an estimated 6.4 percent of the adult population abuses alcohol and 6.6 percent experience major depression.

LHL reaches about 200 clients a year, far fewer than the number who could benefit from the organization.

LHL relies heavily on volunteers to get the word out and to work with potential clients.

The Lighthouse Plan relies on those volunteers for now, but envisions training and placing them throughout the state to increase outreach because, as Carroll said, “Gaining clients helps the profession.... Our problem is not helping people. Our problem is reaching people.”



To date, lawyers needing help usually found LHL through referrals from the Virginia State Bar, other lawyers, or the courts. “We’ve been a passive agency,” Carroll said. “If you’re an attorney in southwest Virginia, Richmond is a long way away.”

The idea is to place volunteer lawyers who are known in their communities so that lawyers who need help “have someone who they know and trust. That person becomes the lighthouse back to Lawyers Helping Lawyers.”

The first step in the Lighthouse Plan is to set up pilot projects in Roanoke and Alexandria. “Those two are going to prove to us, if we build it, they will come,” Carroll said. He will be able to measure the effectiveness of the program with an eye toward expanding it to ten locations in 2018, or “however many we can afford to do.”

That will take money. Managing and supporting volunteers across the state will require a staff. The long-term plan includes hiring case workers, an outreach coordinator, and developing sustainable funding for clinical growth.

LHL gets by on a budget of about \$260,000 a year, including \$150,000 from the members of the Virginia State Bar. Other funding comes from the Virginia Board of Bar Examiners, ALPS, the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, and donations. Carroll said he knows those sources are maxed out, so he intends to seek other funding sources.

**Individuals can support the program when they use Amazon.com to buy goods. Simply log into Amazon Smile, select Lawyers Helping Lawyers as your designated charity, and 0.5 percent of your purchase price will be donated to it.**

Carroll, who was a corporate executive, took a pay cut to become a part-time executive director at LHL. Why? “Every single day, I see Jim Leffler saving someone’s life.”

He sees a day in the near future when the organization can vastly expand the number of lives, and careers, it can save.