

THIS MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT NETWORKING YOU'LL EVER DO

NEW SOLACE PROGRAM OFFERS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO LEGAL PROFESSIONALS IN CRISIS

BY HON. NANCY ALLF

Suppose you are diagnosed with a serious illness and need extensive treatment in another city where you know no one. What would you do?

One legal professional who faced such a scenario found help from a network of other law professionals called SOLACE. This Louisiana lawyer needed chemotherapy treatments for four months in Houston. SOLACE members helped him find affordable housing and he completed his treatments with that much less stress.

SOLACE is an acronym for Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel – All Concern Encouraged. The sole purpose of the program is to enable the legal community to reach out in a small, but meaningful and compassionate way to those judges, lawyers, court personnel, paralegals, legal secretaries and their families who experience a death, catastrophic illness, injury or unfortunate circumstance. It is the brainchild of New Orleans attorney Mark Suprenant and U.S. District Judge Jay Zainey.

The program works quite simply, but the effects can be significant. Members notify the program administrator when they learn of some tragedy or dire circumstance striking someone within the legal community. Working with that member and close friends of the family, a determination can be made as to what would be the most appropriate expression of support and concern. That can range from simply sending the family a card signed by recognized local and state leaders to providing the family with meals, much needed support, assistance with grocery shopping or child care or whatever the situation might warrant.

SOLACE began in Louisiana in 2002 with a few attorneys and legal professionals. The network is now supported by the Louisiana State Bar Association and is made up of more than 7,500 legal professionals, all within e-mail reach. SOLACE is guided by the motto “There’s Nothing Too Big, There’s Nothing Too Small.”

Here’s how SOLACE works: each member provides an e-mail address that is added to the SOLACE network. When a request for help comes in, a group e-mail goes out to every member. Members read the e-mail and decide if they, or a member of their network of family and friends, can help and in what way. There is never any pressure to offer assistance – this is a purely voluntary organization. The e-mails are a way for legal professionals to learn of situations where someone in the legal

“family” needs help, and gives them an opportunity to provide that help.

The SOLACE program is very simple and straightforward with a few basic guidelines. First, SOLACE is never used to solicit monetary contributions – only assistance or donations in kind. Second, for practical purposes, the program is limited to requests on behalf of our legal community (as defined above) and its immediate family members. Third, confidentiality is emphasized. SOLACE broadcasts will not include the identity of the person in need without their permission.

SOLACE has been expanding to become a nationwide network. Nevada is the eighth state to start a SOLACE program. If any of our members need help from a SOLACE program in another state, an e-mail can be sent to their members.

Here are some other examples of how this effective organization has worked:

- providing air transportation for emergency medical issues;
- offering housing, clothing, office space, office furniture, law books, etc. to attorneys whose office buildings were destroyed by fire, earthquake or other natural disaster; and
- sending condolence cards to bereaved families

One thing that sets SOLACE apart is the speed with which it operates. E-mails go out as soon as SOLACE receives requests, and members reply quickly – often within minutes. In the example above, where the patient needed housing in Houston, the initial request went out at 11:58 p.m. By 8:35 a.m. the next morning a member had responded and gotten the ball rolling.

If you’d like to become a SOLACE member, and I encourage you to do so, simply sign up by sending an e-mail to Lori Wolk at loriw@nvbar.org, and she will add you to the listserve.

SOLACE promises to be an exciting and worthwhile program, with the potential to serve countless members of our legal family. We look forward to sharing many wonderful and heartwarming success stories with you in the future.

For more information on the program, including our FAQs, please visit www.nvbar.org > For Lawyers > Member Benefits > SOLACE. ■



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