

Secular program tackles addiction

By SARA STROUD

Times-Herald staff report

BENICIA — How was your week?

It's a simple question, but for one substance abuse recovery group with meetings in Benicia and Vallejo, it's also a touchstone that keeps members coming back to share their small victories and setbacks in their struggles with addiction.

LifeRing is a secular, or non-religious, program. Unlike some other recovery programs, there is no talk of a higher power, no steps and no sponsors.

"We have one bottom line rule: We do not drink or use drugs — no matter what," said John DeYoung, who runs the Benicia meeting and one of the two in Vallejo.

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LifeRing

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During the meetings, participants sit in a circle, taking turns discussing their week and their plans for the coming one.

Talking about one's week presents a "low entry barrier," according to LifeRing literature, and allows newcomers to participate from day one.

Concentrating discussion on a narrow time period also allows participants to "focus on



DeYoung:
LifeRing director

today," DeYoung said. It also prevents them from getting bogged down in "war stories" or romanticizing their past.

Feedback, known as crosstalk, is encouraged.

At a recent Benicia meeting, some group members discussed problems with family and careers, while others shared recent triumphs. But even if their weeks were tough, many of the 13 participants said the connection and support of the LifeRing meeting made things easier.

Founded in 2001 and based in Oakland, LifeRing has about

100 face-to-face meetings, plus online groups, with the largest concentration being in the Bay Area.

While LifeRing is non-religious, it is not anti-religion — about 40 percent of members attend some form of worship services, according to a LifeRing survey.

Richard, a LifeRing member who battled alcoholism after his wife's death, said many people have "trouble with the god concept," in some other programs, which is absent from LifeRing.

But LifeRing does not discourage people from participating in other programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, DeYoung said. In fact, many participants work on their sobriety through multiple programs at the same time, customizing their own recovery, he said.

"There's a lot of overlap," DeYoung said. "It's not a competition, just another option."

Benicia LifeRing meetings are held at 7 p.m. Tuesdays at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 122 E. J St.

Vallejo meetings are held at 4:30 p.m. Mondays and at 1 p.m. Fridays at Kaiser Permanente Chemical Dependency Recovery Program, 800 Sereno Drive.

For more information, call 746-7124 or visit www.unhooked.com.

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