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## LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION on COMPULSIVE GAMBLING HELPLINE OPERATIONS

Problem Gamblers Helpline ✕ Suicide Prevention Helpline ✕ Substance Abuse Helpline

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NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### Helpline Specialists Certified

The people who are often the “first responders” in a personal crisis have been credentialed.

REECE MIDDLETON, Executive Director of the Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling, and COLLEEN LEONARD, Program Director for Helpline Operations, recognized fourteen Helpline Specialists as *Certified Helpline Specialists* December 10, 2010.

The Certification, provided by LACG, confirms that the Helpline Specialist has completed a curriculum in providing information and referral for compulsive gambling, suicide prevention, and substance abuse disorders; has completed the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), served a minimum of 1,000 mentored hours answering the Helplines; and adheres to a Helpline Code of Ethics.

Helpline Specialists receiving certification are Walter Abney, Yolanda Adams, T.J. Barnett, Greg Below, Romanetha Brown, Catherine Cooper, Robyn Filler, Teshekia Golston, Effie Hyde, Charles Jones, Mary O’Kray, Maranda Pearson, Iberia Watley, and Elke Webb. Four more Specialists are expected to meet certification requirements in March, 2011.

“We’ve long wanted a formal process to recognize the distinct skills and training Helpline Specialists possess,” noted Middleton. “The Helplines do not provide counseling or clinical services, but provide a human contact to listen to immediate issues then offer information about available resource the caller can access. Not everyone can do this delicate work. We have some remarkable people manning the lines twenty-four hours a day and I’m pleased their unique skills are recognized.”

LACG assumed operation of the Problem Gamblers Helpline on January 1, 2000. It is highly visible in Louisiana – noted on lottery tickets, gaming advertisements, and on billboards: 1-877-770-STOP (7867). The Helpline responds to approximately 20,000 calls for assistance each year. It was quickly discovered that a higher than usual percentage of compulsive gamblers attempt and complete suicide. In 2007 the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Behavioral Health, funded a dedicated line for Suicide Prevention for Louisiana residents. In 2009, 250 Louisiana residents called for help on the Suicide Prevention line.

“We do not audio record any calls to the Helpline,” said GEORGE SEWELL, consulting assistant manager. “The Code of Ethics clearly defines the legal and confidential protections

for callers and the information they provide the Specialists. This protection is essential for a person in distress to pick up the phone and seek help. Simply put, the Helpline save lives.”

The Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling operates the Problem Gambling, Suicide Prevention, and Substance Abuse Helplines for Louisiana residents. Additionally LACG also provides problem gambling information and referral services to twenty states. LACG also operates the Center of Recovery providing intensive residential treatment for compulsive gambling and the Intensive Outpatient Program for problem gambling in Shreveport.

All services are listed on the website: <http://www.helpforgambling.org>.

Some of the Helpline Specialists receiving Certification on December 10, 2010:



Reece Middleton, left Charles Jones, right



Reece Middleton, left, Elke Webb, right



Robyn Filler, left, Reece Middleton, right.

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