

**Drug dependency, alcoholism,
financial hang-ups, marital problems...**

HERE'S ONE PROGRAM THAT CAN REALLY HELP

BY PARRI SONTAG

Each one came on like a jackhammer, pounding inside his skull, chiseling away another piece of his life.

“They got worse as time went on,” says Leon Thelen, recalling the migraine headaches that began torturing him 12 years ago. “They could come at any time. Sometimes they’d last an hour, sometimes a day. The pounding would get to the point where I had trouble seeing and got sick to my stomach vomiting.”

As the spells became more frequent, Thelen’s life spiraled rapidly downhill.

A janitor in the Lansing service center, Thelen, 48, was working as a primary meter reader at the time.

“Everything started falling apart,” he says. “I started missing work and not doing it the way it should be done. I was having problems in my marriage. I stopped doing things with my friends and retreated into a shell. I lost my drive. I just didn’t care about anything anymore.”

Desperate to relieve his suffering, he sought help from a physician and was put on strong prescription drugs to combat his pain. The bitter irony was, over the course of six years, Thelen found himself hooked on the very drugs that were supposed to help him.

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more and more to get an effect,” he says. “You get immune to it. I started taking two or three pills at a time, instead of one.”

But at no time in his life has Thelen ever taken any illegal drugs, he says.

“That was the tricky part,” he says. “As long as it was coming from a doctor, I thought I was OK.”

As his headaches worsened, Thelen sought opinions from other medical professionals.

“I was in so much pain,” he remembers. “I ended up getting prescriptions from more than one doctor. I’d change them. Instead of one refill, I’d put down four.”

His drug problem cost him his marriage and his job with CPCo. Eventually, it landed him in a county jail for six months for falsifying prescriptions.

“I knew I had a problem, but I thought I could handle it myself,” Thelen remembers. “I figured I could just cut back. But it got to a point where I’d take the medication even when the migraines didn’t come.”

Doctors finally discovered a tumor in Thelen's sinus cavity. It was surgically removed, eliminating his headaches.

"But," he admits, "I still wanted to take the medication. When I didn't have it, I'd start going through withdrawal."

Today, thanks to CPCo's Employee Assistance Service (EAS), Thelen has been off drugs for five years and has been rehired by Consumers.

EAS is a confidential referral service which can direct employees and their dependents to professional assistance — not only for alcohol and drug dependence, but for a wide range of personal issues including depression, stress, family or marital difficulties, divorce, rape and physical, sexual or emotional abuse. It can also help with work-related problems, eating disorders, gambling, financial difficulties, even legal aid.

"The purpose is to encourage employees and their dependents to seek help to correct personal problems that may affect their work," explains Judy Smith, CPCo fitness for duty administrator. "If an employee needs help, we'll work alongside them to get it."

"EAS helped me get over the guilt and realize I had a sickness that could be treated," Thelen says. "They gave me one-on-one counseling that really made a difference in my life."

Counseling not only helped him deal with his addiction, but with his divorce, he says.

Counselors also rallied to get Thelen his job back. They met with CPCo managers and explained the changes he was making in his life. The company gave Thelen a second chance and rehired him into the facilities department.

"Getting me off the substance was just the beginning," Thelen says. "EAS helped me rebuild my whole life. And they've walked hand-in-hand with me through the entire process."

Throughout the state, CPCo contracts with local agencies to

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provide EAS services to employees and their dependents. Local telephone numbers are posted on bulletin boards at every work site.

When an employee calls EAS, an initial appointment is scheduled. During that time, the problem is assessed by a trained counselor. Together, the counselor and the employee devise a strategy to successfully address the problem.

In some cases, short-term counseling is appropriate. This usually is available on-site at the agency. In other instances, a referral is made.

CPCo pays the cost of the initial visit or visits to EAS referral agencies. Long-term care is often covered under other benefit plans.

"Some of these problems require more help than we can apply under our contract," says Jo Hall, the management consultant for CARES Employee Assistance Program, a Lansing agency that provides EAS services to employees in Lansing, Williamston, Eaton Rapids, Charlotte and at the Whiting Plant. "We can only offer about eight sessions under our contract. We make referrals if a person needs more than short-term counseling."

Referrals may also be made if someone needs specialized care such as psychiatric care, help with an eating disorder, testing for learning disabilities or help dealing with a financial or legal problem.

EAS-contracted agencies also make referrals to physicians. They might suspect, for instance, that one's depression or erratic behavior is rooted in a physical problem.

Substance abuse clients are also sometimes referred for specialized care.

Tyrone Davis, a 50-year-old machinist at the Cobb plant, for instance, contacted EAS in January 1989 for help dealing with alcoholism and was referred for substance abuse treatment.

"After my initial visit, counselors suggested I go to an outpatient clinic for half the day and work the other half," Davis recalls. "But I knew that wouldn't work for me. I would still have access to alcohol. As soon as I got out of work or classes, I'd most likely go get myself a drink."

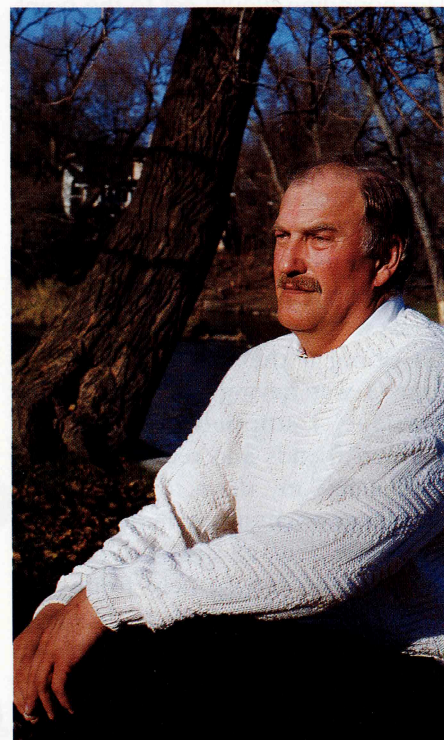


Photo by Jeannette McDonald

EAS helped Leon Thelen kick an addiction to prescription drugs.



Thanks to EAS, Cobb machinist Tyrone Davis (pictured with wife Vanessa) was able to beat a 23-year drinking problem.

Davis felt the only thing that would work for him was a program that would completely isolate him from alcohol.

"We came to a mutual agreement that what was best for me was a residential treatment program," he says. "I went right here in Muskegon. It was a 28-day program. My insurance picked up the tab."

Thanks to EAS, he has been able to beat a 23-year drinking problem. It's been six years since he last had a drink.

"I was at the point where alcohol had just about destroyed me," Davis recalls. "I drank from the moment I got out of work to the time I went to bed. Had I kept that up, only three things could have happened: I'd wake up in jail or in an insane asylum. Or I would have ended up dead."

He feels blessed, he says, that EAS was there for him.

"Thanks to EAS, my life has changed in every way you can imagine — finances, family relations, work relations, church relations," Davis says. "I went from probably the least-liked guy at the plant to chief steward of the local union."

More and more employees like Davis and Thelen are taking advantage of the Employee Assistance Service.

In 1993, 1,179 problems were diagnosed, compared to 754 in 1989. As of Sept. 30 of this year, 818 problems have been diagnosed. (CPCo does not keep statistics on the actual number of people using the service. Often, more than one problem has been diagnosed in the same person. For instance, a person who is depressed might also be a cocaine user.)

The largest number of EAS referrals are for family and marital problems, followed by psychological

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and emotional difficulties and substance abuse.

"But we've worked with all kinds of problems," says Hall of CARES. "We've worked with employees who care for elderly parents. It's a difficult process to place a parent in a nursing home. There's a lot of guilt."

"We've worked with parents who are dealing with children having problems at school. We've helped clients with compulsive gambling, with gangs and cults, even multiple personalities."

There are several ways to access EAS services.

Each General Office, plant and region has an EAS committee which includes at least two designated coordinators from each of the three work groups — OM&C, SE-W and EA&P. The coordinators can direct employees to the designated agency for that location.

Contact numbers also are available through human resources. Or employees may contact EAS referral agencies directly (*see page 8*). Most of the agencies provide 24-hour phone coverage.

Following is a list of EAS referral agencies, which you may call directly 24-hours-a-day, unless otherwise indicated:

Company location	Referral agency
Lansing Williamston Eaton Rapids Charlotte Whiting	CARES Employee Assistance Program 913 W. Holmes Road Suite 255 Lansing, MI 48910 (517) 393-4191 (800) 234-4191
Alma Clare Gladwin	Mid-Michigan Employee Assistance Centers, Inc. 303 W. Superior Suite 2 P.O. Box 5083 Alma, MI 48801 (517) 466-2707 (800) 717-2707
Muskegon FMS-West Cobb	Child and Family Services 1352 Terrace Muskegon, MI 49442 (616) 726-3582
Traverse City Kalkaska Cadillac Marion Ludington Tawas Alpena Cheboygan Gaylord Grayling Manistee Boyne City Big Rapids Tippy Dam Honor	Community Family and Children's Services/ Catholic Charities 1000 Hastings Traverse City, MI 49684 (616) 947-8387 (8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.) <i>Satellite locations:</i> (517) 356-6385 (Alpena) (616) 775-6581 (Cadillac, Marion, Kalkaska) (616) 627-9917 (Cheboygan) (517) 732-6761 (Gaylord) (517) 378-3149 (Grayling, Kalkaska) (616) 723-6321 (Manistee and Ludington) (616) 582-6406 (Boyne City) (517) 362-8016 (Tawas) <i>After hours (all locations):</i> (800) 442-7315
Midland Serv Ctr Karn-Weadock FMS-East Bay City	Family Clinic & Pathways Outpatient 2303 E. Amelith Road Bay City, MI 48706 (517) 684-9313
Grand Rapids Hastings Greenville Zeeland	Employee Assistance Center 1241 E. Beltline Waters Circle, Suite 150 Grand Rapids, MI 49505 (616) 975-3560 (800) 227-0905
Macomb County	Employee Assistance Center 36358 Garfield Fraser, MI 48026 (810) 412-0070
St. Clair Marysville Ray	Industrial Health Systems 1005 River St. Port Huron, MI 48060 (810) 982-4980

Company location	Referral agency
Battle Creek	Occupational Health Center of America 395 South Shore Oak Ridge Office Park #209 Battle Creek, MI 49015 (616) 964-2551 (800) 523-0591
Flint	Occupational Health Center of America G2503 S. Linden Flint, MI 48532-5419 (810) 230-0040 (800) 235-6422
General Office Jackson Serv Ctr Freedom	Occupational Health Center of America 123 N. West Ave., Suite E Jackson, MI 49201 (517) 787-8933 (800) 523-0591
Howell Royal Oak Livonia Pontiac Macomb	Occupational Health Center of America 31201 Chicago Road, Suite A202 Warren, MI 48093 (810) 578-7400 (800) 852-0357
Kalamazoo White Pigeon Overisel Allegan	Occupational Health Center of America 5360 Holiday Terrace Kalamazoo, MI 49009 (616) 372-4500 (800) 523-0591
Midland Trng Ctr	Occupational Health Center of America 5103 Eastman Place, Suite 124 Midland, MI 48640 (517) 631-9904
Palisades	Occupational Health Center of America 815 Main St. St. Joseph, MI 49085 (616) 982-1688 (800) 523-0591
Saginaw	Occupational Health Center of America One Tuscola, Suite 301 Saginaw, MI 48607-1248 (517) 754-5599 (800) 334-6422
Campbell	Pine Rest Christian Hospital P.O. Box 165 300 68th Street, SE Grand Rapids, MI 49501-0165 (616) 455-5000, Ext. 2400 Emergencies: (616) 455-9200
Big Rock	Woodland Counseling Center 560 W. Mitchell, 5th Floor Petoskey, MI 49770 (616) 348-2415 (8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Most people volunteer to come in on their own, but sometimes a supervisor will recommend that an employee use the program, because their job performance is declining.

Smith stresses that strict confidentiality is maintained throughout the entire EAS process. Information is never released without the consent of the employee.

"The company knows how many people have gone and whether they're male or female, EA&P, SE-W, OM&C or dependents, their age bracket and a general idea of what the problem is. We don't know or have access to any names."

Both Thelen and Davis came forward on their own to talk about the EAS program.

"I just hope my story can help someone else," Davis says. "When you're in a bad situation, you think there's no end to it, but there is."

Why are companies beginning to provide these types of services?

"It's saving CPCo a good bit of money," Hall says. "We know that programs like ours reduce absenteeism, tardiness, grievances and job performance problems."

EAS programs increase productivity, Hall says. They also reduce the number of accidents, on and off the job.

"If you have an argument with your boyfriend or husband, and you stay up until four in the morning, then get up at seven to drive to work, by mid-afternoon you're not concentrating," Hall says. "If you're hanging off a 65-foot pole, that's not a good place to be in that condition."

EAS programs work with employees who have declining performance and get them back to where they enjoy coming to work and doing the best job they're capable of.

In short, says Hall, "We return to employers the employees they hired." ■