

Christian Addiction Expert Gives Her Insights at UN Committee

Charles and Jean LaCour are the co-founding pioneers of the addiction-recovery organization—NET Training Institute.



[] The Christian president of a successful addiction-recovery training center in Orlando, Fla., was invited to Europe this week to participate in the United Nations Workgroup on Drugs and Crime, a once-a-decade committee that reassesses international drug policies on addiction and prevention.

“[The U.N.] recognizes the tremendous work that’s being done by nonprofits and faith organizations in the lives of people,” said Jean LaCour, co-founder of the Christ-centered NET Training Institute, licensed by the Florida Department of Education. “They don’t care what theology you have. They want to know who is doing something.”

She said governments are recognizing that prison ministries, youth ministries and homeless ministries are valuable antidotes for today’s addict. “We need to deal with the consumers,” she said. “But there’s not a lot of money for that because it’s not as showy. There’s no [bad guy].”

LaCour said more than 300 nongovernmental organizations will attend the U.N. study group in Vienna, Austria, where she will call for “maintaining treatment standards” and funding international nonprofits involved in “demand reduction.”

“This is something we want to scream loud and clear,” she said. “Billions of dollars are spent by every government in the U.N. on interdiction and law enforcement efforts. They love the Rambo approach—the helicopters and the napalming of poppy fields. But this hasn’t stemmed the tide [of drug

addiction] one iota.”

Seizing a few more boats off the Gulf Coast or anything else that might slow the drug trade doesn't stem the tide of addiction when “our consumption rate is so high and so intense and so persistently growing that it's always worth it for a good entrepreneur to keep on producing for us,” LaCour said. “It's called supply and demand, and we're driving that.”

Knowing the importance of dealing with the demand comes from personal experience for LaCour. She endured years of pain and codependency with her formerly addicted spouse. “Part of our story is Charles' battle with alcoholism,” she said of her husband.

“I went through churches all through the 1980s trying to find help and nobody believed [Charles] was an alcoholic because he was president of [our city's] chamber of commerce, he had 500 employees, he was president of a large hotel company, we wrote big checks in churches, we were pillars and model leaders in our community. So nobody believed.”

Today, along with their staff at NET, which has trained 2,000 counselors since 1996, the LaCours strongly advocate for addicts and addicts' families in overcoming stigmas and the lack of treatment centers at the state, national and international levels. Charles LaCour is the director of NET Training Institute, and along with his wife, he helped to launch ISAAC—the International Substance Abuse Addiction Coalition, a group comprised of hundreds of Christian grass-roots counselors and clinical doctors in 68 nations.

The couple also coordinates faith-based recovery efforts with secular clinics—offering government-approved recovery training in 14 nations and both on-site and off-site addiction counseling education for pastoral and professional caregivers, from jail chaplains to therapists.

Jean LaCour was appointed by former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush in 2005 to serve on his Faith-Based and Community Advisory Board. She later served for two years as the statewide faith coordinator for Florida's Access to Recovery (ATR), a national

program designed to connect faith-based groups with state funding.

“Substance abuse and addiction is the No. 1 public issue that nobody sees,” she said. “But obviously government sees it. Addiction affects every area of social services. They are bogged down with neglected, abandoned and abused children.”

But down-and-out street addicts are not the only liability of social welfare budgets. LaCour said statistics show businesses, which rely heavily on HMO medical plans, employ 73 percent of America’s admitted addicts. “The illusion that the addicted person is in an abandoned building snorting coke is from a bad stereotype. The typical person who reports for treatment is an employed 35-year-old Caucasian male,” she said.

“Any smart human resources person in any business knows there are people right on their own staff who are dealing with their own addiction or a family member’s addiction. There are lost days, lost hours, lost productivity. ... Your health insurance is covering someone else’s liver transplant.”

Of the 22 million Americans in need of addiction treatment, less than 4 million actually receive help, said LaCour—a difference she referred to as the “treatment gap.”

“So the government looks at this treatment gap and says: ‘Who out there is dealing with addiction in any way, shape or form?’” she said.

Because she has used secular standards over the years to help hundreds achieve state-certification in Florida, Georgia and Kentucky, LaCour has gained respect from peers and intimate knowledge of faith-based funding.

“You can’t use funds to proselytize,” she said. “But we are no longer excluded just because we are faith-based. People who have the heart and compassion to be doing this in their neighborhoods and communities should be able to compete for federal grants.”

LaCour has partnered with many international organizations. In Egypt NET Institute was given permission to train Muslims in addiction treatment. She said God anoints vessels to carry out the work of recovery and that Christians shouldn't be too obsessed with proselytizing. "We're very bound by this legal and apologetic mind-set that you have to continually be pressing your point," she said.

"But [helping addicts] is the perfect job for the kingdom of God. More people come to Christ through recovery outreaches than you can imagine." **—Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**