

Have You Tried Helpline ?

Gazette: What exactly is the Helpline and how does it work?

Wilcox: Helpline basically is a 24 hour phone-in counselling, information, referral and crisis intervention service. What that means is that anybody who has a phone can call the Helpline and find out what time it is or if the pills they just took are a lethal dosage and what they should do about that. It runs the whole gamut - you think of any problems you might run up against in a day. A lady phoning up to find out if it's serious that the ammonia lines in her fridge are broken and the fridge is smelling. That may not sound like an important problem but the fact of the matter is that when the food is exposed to the ammonia the food is poisoned.

Gazette: You say it works 24 hours. How many people work on the night shift and is that your busiest time?

Wilcox: On a night shift we have one or two people; it is and it isn't our busiest time. There are usually fewer calls coming in on the graveyard shift - that's the early morning hours - but when you do get a call it'll often turn out to be an hour and a half counselling call. It's a really gruelling routine.

Gazette: Who works at the Helpline and why? Are they volunteers or are they mostly paid staff?

Wilcox: They're all volunteers - we have a 100% volunteer staff line. People that work there run the gamut from psychiatrists, psychologists - which you might expect - to dockworkers, cleaning ladies, housewives, students and semi-professional people. There really isn't a common denominator. Our youngest has just turned 18 and our oldest, I think, is 74.

Gazette: Is it a city organization?

Wilcox: It's a city wide organization, we're United Appeal funded, and we're completely autonomous.

Gazette: What do you do when you get a really serious call? Do you merely counsel or is it often a case where the person has to be referred to a hospital or a doctor?

Wilcox: If it's a very serious call, say a massive overdose taken two hours ago and the person's ready to pass out, if we can get their address we'll send out one of our own crisis interveners. This is only on very serious calls, we will not go out and pick up cigarettes for people. We'll get them into the hospital. If there's any violence threatened to our crisis interveners, who are also volunteers, we have to send the police. Now if the caller says not to send the police we're in a bit of a bind because we won't go against a caller's wishes.

Gazette: Are all the calls treated with total discretion, names never revealed, or what is the procedure on some of the calls?

Wilcox: On all the calls there is complete, absolute confidentiality. We have a training session for everyone who wants to work at the Helpline, no matter what their background is in counselling skills. The psychiatrists get trained along with the housekeepers.

Gazette: How many volunteers do you have?

Wilcox: We have at any one time between 130 and 150 volunteers. The time commitment for each volunteer is not that heavy because as you can understand working the line is a real drain. You couldn't work a 40 hour week on the line.

Gazette: Who calls the Helpline?

Wilcox: People who call the Helpline usually just have a problem that they don't have access in their own circle of friends, relations or their own personal knowledge to handle. So you get a lot of say people on Welfare with certain kinds of problems. They don't have

a lawyer living next door so if they need legal information they can phone us, and we'll either give them the information or get them in touch with someone who can. On the other hand if you're an executive earning \$60,000 a year and you have a sexual problem with your wife you're not going to talk to your neighbor about it. They're in just as much of a bind as the person on Welfare, so they phone. It's really totally cross cultural.

Gazette: What is your relationship with other agencies? Are you funded by more than United Appeal grants?

Wilcox: Well, on funding, half our budget comes from the United Appeal and the other half from the cities of Halifax and Dartmouth and that again is cost shared with the Provincial and Federal governments.

Our relationship with other agencies is basically fantastic, everyone from Birthright to the police. I think we have something like 220 agencies on our list that one way or another we refer people to.

Gazette: Do you get many calls from students?

Wilcox: Yes, lots of calls - three times a year. The rest of the year they're pretty much like any other group but 3 times a year we get calls; in August when they're looking for housing, at Christmas for exams and in April for exams. At Christmas and in April we really have a lot of kids who are feeling the pressure and just don't know if they can handle it.

Gazette: What types of ways would you recommend a student handle the types of stress he/she is under and what do the students themselves seem to be doing to deal with stress or do they succumb to it?

Wilcox: In many cases students have a tendency to succumb to the stress they are under. It's a pressure of excelling or in some cases just passing, making a name for yourself, getting the marks. There's peer group pressure, parental pressure, job pressure, Education is an important part of their life and they don't really have a sense of perspective about it. In the late teens and early 20's they are already going through a lot of other changes just finding out who they are. There is tremendous pressure and it's hard, but not impossible to deal with.

Gazette: Do you find that exams bring out a lot of other problems in late adolescence? If so, which do you treat - the stress of exams or the more basic stress that's a problem of that age group?

Wilcox: Well, as soon as you start saying to somebody "you're just young, you'll get over it" they hang up. As soon as you minimize someone's problems they won't listen to you and they won't tell you what's really bugging them. Sometimes it helps a person to just state what their problem is and once they can quantify it by speaking their fears it seems to fade.

Gazette: How many calls do you get in an average day at Helpline?

Wilcox: In a really average day we get 49.6 calls. It runs generally between 35 and 60 calls in a day and the calls are of varying length. So you might get a 60 call day but it seemed like a quiet shift because everybody was asking things like "what's the phone number for the police dept." You can have a heavy day with only 20 calls but they're all an hour and a quarter depressed drunks.

Gazette: What do you do with a depressed drunk or with somebody who's extremely freaked out on drugs?

Wilcox: Keep talking, keep asking questions. You find out if they're depressed, what's depressing them. If someone's on speed you just keep them talking. If they're freaking out you bring them back to things that are very tangible around them like the phone. If it's really a bad freak out or you suspect there's something else in the drug that's dangerous you'll try to get somebody to them and get them into the hospital.

Gazette: Is there any way you can try to guarantee that someone in this predicament who's crying out for help really does get some long term help?

Wilcox: We can't do that with a phone service. We rely on other agencies that have the funds and the facilities. Though we let other agencies take care of these things

Cont'd on pg. 6

VERN'S SPAGHETTI & PIZZA PALACE



COMPARE FOR YOURSELF!!

OUR QUALITY FOOD - THE FINEST
OUR PRICES - THE LOWEST

HAVING A PARTY?—

CALL FOR FAST SERVICE AND DELIVERY!

423-4168 6448 QUINPOOL 423-7451

HOURS: 3 p.m.-2 a.m. RD.

FRI. SAT. 3 p.m.- 3a.m.

SUN. 4 p.m.- 1 a.m.

SERVING DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY for FIVE YEARS 1970-1975

HOUSE OF RODNEY

- ▶ THE FINEST IN MEN'S WEAR
 - ▶ LEISURE SUITS by PORTS INTERNATIONAL
 - ▶ PETER SCOTT SWEATERS
 - ▶ HATHAWAY SHIRTS
 - ▶ DAYS CORDS
 - ▶ IMPORTED OUTWEAR
 - ▶ INCLUDING DUFFEL COATS & LEATHERS
- LORD NELSON ARCADE
423-8807 429-4685
SCOTIA SQUARE
425-3677

APPLICATIONS ARE SOLICITED FOR THE

POSITIONS OF OMBUDSMAN and ASSISTANT OMBUDSMAN

SUBMIT APPLICATIONS TO:

CHAIRMAN OMBUDSMAN COMMITTEE

RM. 124 ARTS & ADMINISTRATION BLDG.

APPLICATIONS CLOSE SEPT. 26/75

