

Help Line reaches thousands

Lending a helping ear

If you have ever needed someone—anyone—and reached out and found no one there; if there have been times when you just had to know the number of an agency, but could not find anyone who knew; if you remember a time when you needed to know how to spell 'eudemonism' for a late night term paper, but could find on one to ask—you should know that there is one place where all these (and many more!) situations can be accommodated—The Halifax Help Line

by John Cairns

Halifax's Help Line is a round-the-clock volunteer telephone service battling human problems. Unfortunately, it has its own problem. It is short staffed, and is actively seeking recruits to answer telephones and interact with the public.

Contacted in their secret location somewhere in Halifax, Cheryl Downton, the Help Line co-ordinator, explained her project's history, its function, and its needs. The service began in 1969 as a

pilot project of the Welfare Council of Halifax and Dartmouth. It continued eight months, and ended amid feasibility studies asserting the need for it to continue. Thus, in 1970 four students from the Maritime School of Social Work revived it with help from approximately one hundred fifty additional students and area practitioners. The Help Line has never been idle since.

As a crisis center, the Help Line assists callers through counselling, referral, and information. The volunteers are not professionals, but they do have basic training, and they are more than willing to listen and communicate, qualities sorely sought by troubled callers.

Though unable to answer every question, volunteers reveal all they know, and from extensive files, they provide addresses where additional details may be sought. Cheryl Downton stresses that she and her colleagues can attack almost any problem. She also emphasizes the importance of supplying information without red tape or hassles.

Four per cent of calls involve suicide, and the troubled Canadian economy is often to blame.

The predicaments of callers are varied, and so are the solutions. Sometimes people need simple information, where to buy groceries late at

night, or where to immediately obtain fresh diapers for their baby. During the inauguration of Pope Paul II a rash of calls demanded to know when the Pope would finally stop monopolizing television time.

Other calls, however, are more serious, the most common ones featuring alcohol abuse. Also frequent are cases of family breakdown and loneliness or depression. Four percent of calls involve threats of suicide, and in all these situations, the troubled Canadian economy is often to blame. As Cheryl Downton puts it, "It is downright depressing if you have no job or not enough money to feed your kids."

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Rape is an issue on the Dalhousie campus, and the Help Line counsels rape victims. Again in the words of Cheryl Downton, "Rape is a real problem, and that is an understatement . . . I do know one thing though. The rape calls keep coming in, and their severity has gone up."

Perhaps the biggest tribute to the Help Line's effectiveness is the scope of its work. Twenty thousand calls are handled yearly, some of

them in French, and others using a TTY teletype system, are from the deaf. Calls originate from Nova Scotia, and the United States. The most distant one in Cheryl Downton's memory was from Texas. Though some problems are too far away to receive direct help from Halifax, the volunteers can make references to crisis centers anywhere on the continent.

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Presently the Help Line has seventy volunteers. Ideally it needs one hundred and twenty, and this makes recruiting important. Cheryl hopes to have thirty new staff by September 27 for about twelve hours of training between October 7 and October 23. Those interested must attend training, buy a training manual and a directory of community services, and work a minimum of two shifts per month for a year. There will be further short training sessions later.

If you enjoy helping others, or if you have a problem, the Help Line beckons. To volunteer call 422-2048 or 422-6864. For your problem, try 422-7444. The Help Line will always strive to accommodate you.



The Help Line in action: volunteers staff the Halifax service's secretly-located operations centre. Phone calls may ask anything from the names of all night grocery stores to help following rapes.

DSU President Gord Owen says the government is forgetting the long term benefits of university education.

Kim Eycland

McGill Student Society In Debt

MONTREAL (CUP)—The McGill Student Society is \$735,000 in debt to the university and McGill wants its money back.

The debt was incurred in the last three years as the Society expanded its business operations and covered budget deficits. No provision was made in any society budget to begin repaying the debt and the university now wants some indication that the society is going to start paying the money back.

"I wouldn't call this a crisis," said John Armour, McGill University comptroller. "The society has been increasing its commercial undertaking and it's normal for some money to be outstanding," said Armour. "It just got beyond what it should have done. Got to bring it gradually back into line."

Since 1978, successive student councils borrowed more than \$591,000 through overdrafts on the society's account with the university. No interest is charged on the overdrafts.

A further \$144,000 was borrowed in two installments as interest free loans payable within three years.

The bulk of the overdraft went to pay for equipment not provided for in annual budgets.

"In the past, executives have proceeded with all sorts of projects," said society vice president of finances Salim Tharani. "But nobody made any commitment to reduce the deficit."

The society placed \$125,000 in short term deposits last year using the interest as working capital.

Armour said it was "a bit unusual that the student society should be enjoying a short term investment while they owe us money."

Tharani presented the society's executive committee with a debt repayment plan which calls for the society to turn over \$205,000 to McGill by the end of the 1980-81 financial year.

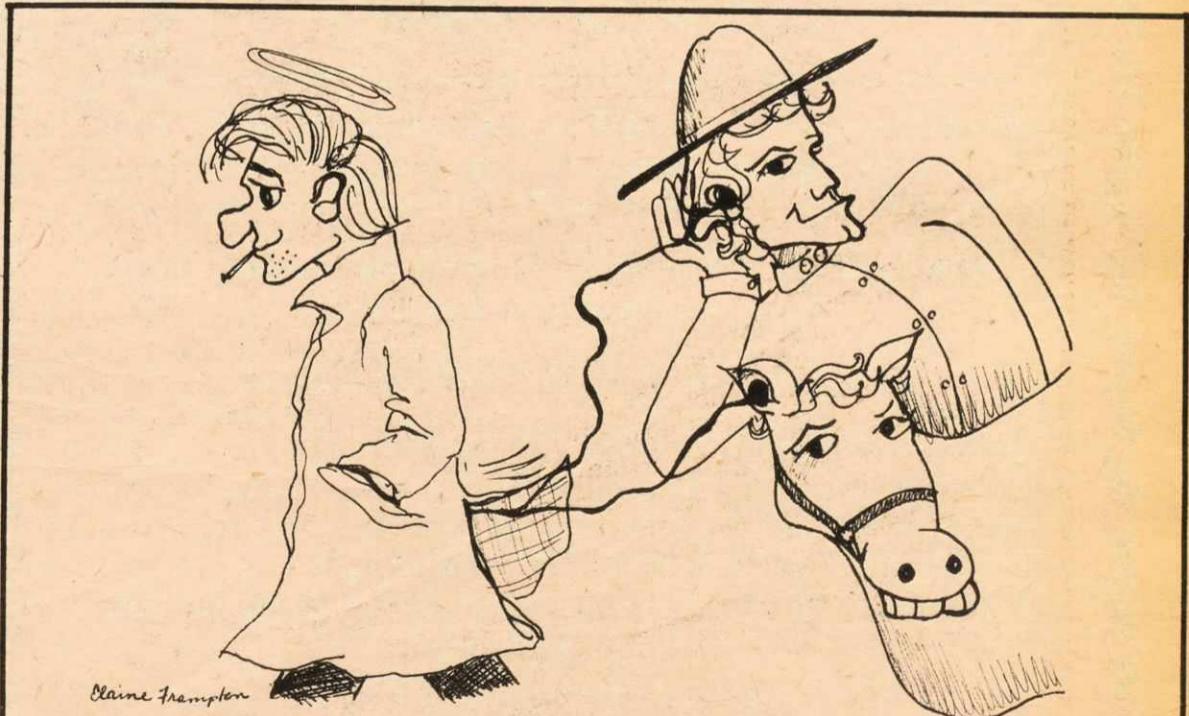
The payments include the \$125,000 short term deposit which was turned over in the last week of August. Between 1981 and 1984 the society would repay \$386,000 in annual installments. Repayments of the \$144,000 loan has already been provided for in a separate plan.

The repayments will substantially reduce the extra revenue the society expected to gain from the fee increase

students approved last year.

Fees were increased by 23 per cent, to bring in an extra \$108,000 this year.

"I wouldn't say that another fee increase is appropriate," Tharani said. "We're just going to have to live within our means from now on."



Elaine Thompson

Struggle! to participate in violence and this kind of police work intimidates groups, makes them secretive and withdrawn and perhaps violent in the long run.

Braybrooke feels that the process of our society is upset by the RCMP restricting free debate and the organization of political groups.

He explains that this is a "free society where we have the right to express dissent . . . the right to assemble, to publicize our views . . . and run candidates in elections."