

AIDS: The facts and the fears

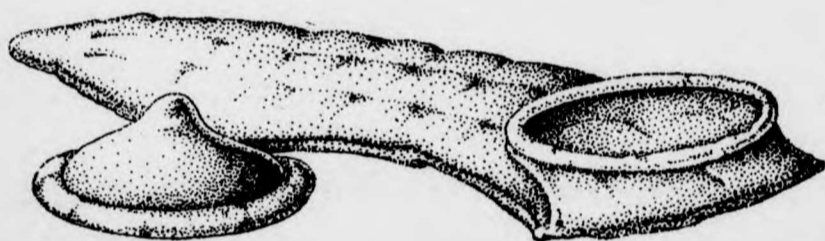
You have just discovered that one of your friends has AIDS. Your first reaction is probably one of confusion, and fear: How fast does the disease progress? What are the symptoms? Can I catch it if he/she touches me, or if we can use the same household facilities? What can I do to help? Where can I get more information?

Through the efforts of York student Ron Kelly, the answers are now readily available. Kelly has organized a new committee on campus to promote AIDS awareness, in an attempt to stem widespread fear and ignorance about the disease.

By ZENA KAMOCKI

Canada's first 24-hour AIDS phone line went live recently at York University, to provide the campus community with information and counselling about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other sexually transmitted diseases. The hotline, in operation since March 18, is part of the ongoing services offered by the newly-formed York University Council for the Prevention of AIDS (YCPA).

The group is concerned that much of the information available to students about AIDS is outdated and largely inaccessible, according to YCPA President and founder Ron Kelly. "Relevant information on AIDS is not finding its way to campus," Kelly told a sparse audience at a press conference in Central Square on Monday. "We are here to provide accurate information on AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases, and to educate students on a student level."



In addition to the phone service, YCPA is operating a drop-in centre, housed temporarily in the Peer Support Centre (room 112 Central Square). Aside from providing one-on-one counselling and information referral services, the Centre also shows explicit videos and distributes literature in several languages on the subject of AIDS and safe sex, in an attempt to reach as many people as possible to help stem fear and ignorance about this and other sexually-transmitted diseases.

"We are here to help anyone, straight or gay, male or female," Kelly stresses. "We are not here to moralize, (or) tell people not to have sex. We just want people to be careful."

YCPA has access to the most up-to-date statistics on AIDS, which change almost daily, Kelly adds. Currently it is estimated that some 50,000 Canadians are carrying the AIDS virus, and 1,730 Canadians have been officially diagnosed as having the fatal disease, which attacks the immune

system, destroying the body's ability to fight infection.

So far, according to Kelly, response to the programme has been very positive. The group was recognized almost immediately by the University as an official organization on campus, he explains, and will hopefully achieve club status in the Council of York Students Federation (CYSF), in the future.

"The CYSF is quite excited that a new committee to deal with AIDS on campus is happening," CYSF president Tammy Hasselheldt said. "We will support the committee and do our best to provide AIDS-awareness during orientation. This will be a good start for ongoing promotion during the year."

Director of Student Affairs Cora Dusk is also supportive of the group's efforts. "For a new organization, they have come a long way," she said. "Ron and his group have gone way out to get current information." Dusk emphasized the impor-

tant of a student effort to promote AIDS-awareness, rather than an Administration-based endeavour. "We are pleased that a student group is involved in this," she explained. "We feel the YCPA can really do a lot for student groups by bringing AIDS out in the open. A campaign of awareness is extremely useful."

YCPA presently receives funding from the Office of Student Affairs, the Women's Centre, and Calumet College at York, Kelly says, and it has also applied for operating grants from the Ontario Ministry of Health. As well, the group is closely affiliated with such organizations as the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), The World Health Organization (WHO), and both the City of North York and City of Toronto Boards of Health, among others. "Health and Welfare Canada (and) the Northwest Territories AIDS programme have been surprisingly helpful," Kelly adds.

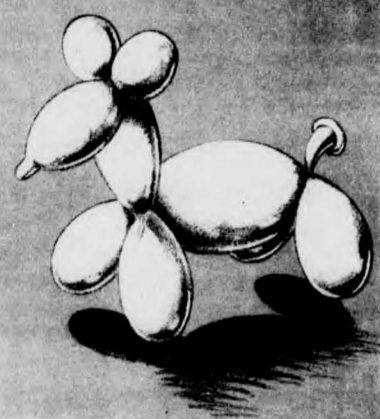
Kelly, the main force behind YCPA, is a second year student at York. he explains that he became

committed almost a year ago to promoting AIDS awareness world-wide. Indeed, YCPA's slogan reflects this objective: "AIDS—a world-wide effort will stop it."

After several months of brainstorming, the idea for YCPA emerged. It took a mere four months to start the project rolling, Kelly says, and so far the organization has encountered few, if any, set-backs. Kelly feels that perhaps attitudes are changing about the disease, as the urgency for more public awareness about the rapidly-spreading virus becomes apparent.

But while AIDS-awareness programmes do exist on other campuses, Kelly feels that the YCPA is unique, in that it operates Canada's first 24 hour AIDS line. "Other uni-

FUN WITH CONDOMS



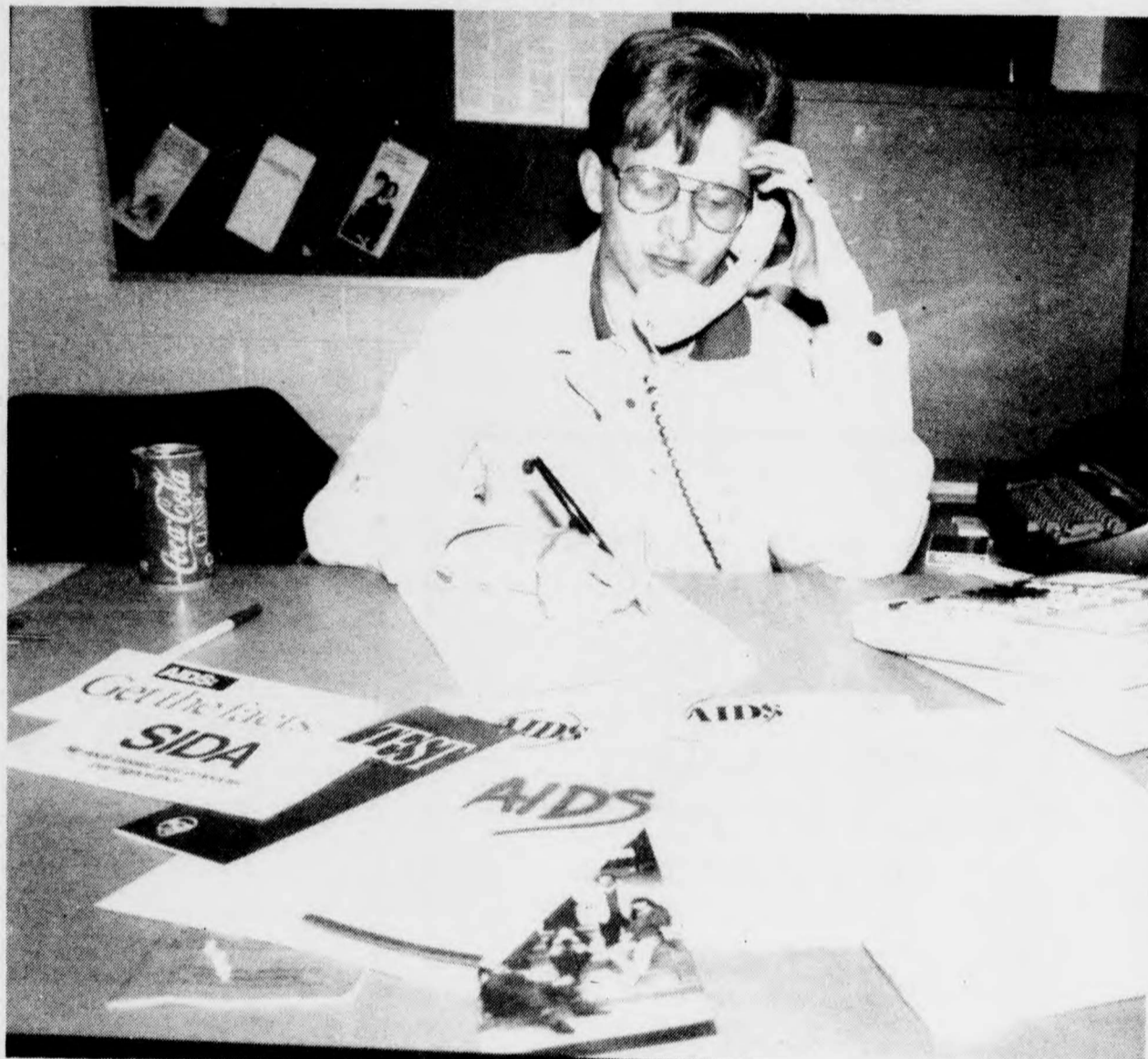
At left: Light-hearted posters like this are widely used to promote AIDS awareness and safe sex.

versities have health-oriented phone lines or task forces," he stresses, "but not a centralized unit (like the YCPA)."

The YCPA currently operates with a staff of 10 volunteers but Kelly is hoping to expand this number to 50 or more as the service gains more recognition in the community. In addition to the group's Orientation Week campaign, YCPA also plans to air short videos before each Reel and Screen movie feature, and a major

fund-raising dinner has been scheduled for October 7. As well, "the YCPA has initiated a national survey of Canadian university students, enquiring about how much students know about AIDS," Kelly adds. "This will tell us if we are doing our job."

All of YCPA's consulting services are confidential and the only information callers are required to give are age and gender. To reach the AIDS hotline, call 736-2100, extension AIDS (2437), between 8:00-2:00 a.m., and 736-5288 after 2:00 a.m.; or visit the drop-in centre at 112 Central Square. Additional information on AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases is available from the Ministry of Health at 392-AIDS (2437).



WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT: Ron Kelly gives over-the-phone counselling about AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases. The 24-hour hotline service now operating at York is the first of its kind in Canada.

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