

# STUDENT HELP -- WHEN THERE'S NO-ONE ELSE

Phone: 432 - 5282

by Fiona Campbell

The office is ridiculously cramped for the number of people sitting within, smoking cigarettes and talking in quiet tones. People drift in and out, sit down and exchange a few words and leave. Occasionally the telephone will ring. At a sign the visitors will leave the office, the door will close, and some student to have a male and a female at all times to help anyone who needs assistance.

In interviews with several of the staff on the Student Help

varying accounts of what the job entailed emerged. All were keen on their work, but some were more reticent than others to explain exactly what goes on, in an effort to protect those they assist. However, in the words of Dan Moss, "We try to handle every legitimate request." And this, as I discovered, covers an amazingly diversified gamut from requests on how to bake a Bible cake to how to communicate with a nearly senseless bella donna user.

Tom Likness, the Director, and Les Blakey, a staff member had much to say on the factual aspects of the operation of Student Help. "We have a grant of \$800 per year, of which \$600 is the telephone bill. The remaining \$200 goes to office supplies" said Likness.

The Student Help idea is similar to a facility at UBC which is called Speakeasy. According to Blakey, the Alberta facilities handle more information calls than actual emotional traumas. Dan Moss estimated that 60 per cent of these calls were just for general campus information.

Expansion of the Student Help arrangement is presently under review. A drop in center in the Central Academic Building is becoming a necessity, which would leave the tiny office in SUB free for phone calls. There is also the possibility of either a drug center or a drug squad. Several staff members however felt that a drug center would be unnecessary because of existing facilities like Trust which handle drug cases.

the time element is vital in the case of potential suicides

In essence, the Help office will suggest legal aid, dispense information on general and occasionally particular subjects, and assist students who feel they are getting a raw deal in an academic matter. In addition sympathetic advice is offered to those suffering from emotional distresses, family problems, landlord-tenant disagreements, and students considering dropping out. Student Help makes some attempt to dispel the loneliness and frustration the university situation can provoke.

Dan Moss described the reaction of most callers to



just sitting around...

...or waiting

somewhere will receive the undivided attention of the volunteer staff of the Student Help office in SUB.

Student Help is a group of concerned students who have had most of the experiences that frustrate and upset people, and who supply an outlet for someone to request information, cry or just talk all in absolute confidence and anonymity.

The Student Help organization has been on this campus for three years, and in that time has become a highly respected and most necessary service. The volunteer staff of 40 students works shifts all week and on the weekends as well. The policy is Student Help as being a confidence inspired by the fact that the staff are students like themselves, unpaid, and there because they care. "The mistaken notion that paid professionals are less concerned than ourselves really seems indicative when we handle students" said Moss. However, there are obviously situations where professionals have to be called in, and the system at Student Help is remarkably comprehensive. Professors and medical specialists are on call at all times. When a more demanding situation arises, Student Help will turn handsprings to see that the student is put in touch with whatever facility he requires from a psychiatrist to a lawyer.

The art of a good volunteer seems to encompass a fine listening capacity and a tremendous amount of common sense. The general policy is to listen with undivided attention, cogitate briefly, and then make a sensible suggestion. Often, by the time the student has aired the problem, it has diminished somewhat in its overwhelming

original proportion, through the mere act of articulation. The solution also seems to become quite obvious to the student before he has even completed the tale of woe, and all that is required is a little gentle direction. With more complicated cases, (and some are absolutely ghastly), the listening is a balm, and the suggestion to place the student in touch with the appropriate authorities helps in sorting out the confusion. The second party can listen and often see ways out that the person involved can not recognize.

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The potential suicide who calls desperately needs someone who will listen to him. The technique in this case is to keep him talking and to try to make him stop and consider absolutely every aspect of what he is about to do. Spur of the moment suicidals can often be helped to reconsider their decision. The time element is vital in this instance and it takes a sensitive person and an individual approach to handle such a situation. Since most students contemplate the last stand with varying degrees of intention, a student can often sympathize better with a fellow

academic who feels the walls coming in on him than an older person with his days of frenetic youth behind him.

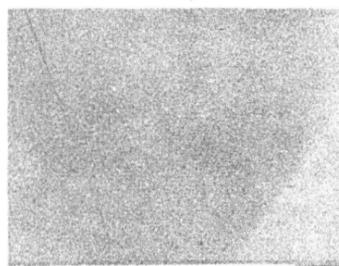
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The whole Student Help arrangement is an oasis in a university that breeds alienation and personal anguish. Although not the fault of the university itself, people find it hard to mingle and the need to unburden one's soul can become chronic without release. Just dropping into the office and having a smoke places a person in an atmosphere of people who are there to talk about anything. They don't care who you are or what your name is; as a matter of fact, many just would rather not know.

It's a good place, and a great idea that is really working. One hopes that more people will take advantage of Student Help to make life easier for themselves and others.

The phone number is 432-5282 and there's always someone there.

There's someone there.



troubles?...

...walk in