

Homosexual Counseling Center

Open in Seattle Area

North West Message

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by rev. case

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Out of work? Romance on the skids? Trouble with family? Marital difficulties? All of us have experienced some of these ordinary obstacles to a happy life, but for the homosexual these problems are altered in both scope and solution by society's almost total rejection of homosexuality. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, occasionally need counseling and guidance concerning these problems but until recently homosexuals in need of counseling have had to seek such a service from and within the very society which despises them. But no longer is this true.

The Seattle Counseling Service for Homosexuals (SCSH) was established in September 1969 through a grant from the Erickson Foundation. Administered by the University of Washington, the grant funds the operating expenses of the SCSH, located at 320 Malden Avenue East, Seattle. The house is shared with the Dorian Society, a Seattle homophile organization whose purpose is to encourage better understanding of the heterosexual community of the problems faced by the homosexual.

Dr. Robert Deisher, director of the Clinical Training Unit, Child Development and Mental Retardation Center at the University Hospital, is currently directing the SCSH. Presently his all-volunteer staff consists of 8 full-time counselors, 5 part-time counselors and about 20 people to maintain the 24-hour telephone service (329-2707). The staff is comprised of both homosexuals and heterosexuals. Most of the counselors have graduate school background in either psychology or sociology.

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"Many of the callers seek counseling in a period of self-identity crisis," said Tom Roesler, head of the Counseling staff and a University of Washington medical student. "The crisis may be due to financial problems, loss of a lover, loss of a job, perhaps because the person's homosexuality has been discovered by the employer, or if married, an argument with the wife or husband," says Roesler. But why a special counseling service for homosexuals when the community already provides a number of mental health services for people seeking guidance and counseling?

"The gay person not only has to cope with all of the challenges faced by the 'straight society' but he also is confronted with society's attitude towards himself as a homosexual," says Roesler. "Most homosexuals don't go to community mental health centers because people usually consider homosexuality to be offensive and threatening to their sense of values. Instead of counseling the homosexual so as to enable him to better cope with a society that despises him, they attempt to 'cure' his homosexuality by attempting to change him into a heterosexual."

The SCSH has an advisory board comprised of a judge, lawyers, medical experts, religious leaders, and the president of the Dorian Society. The board reviews such policies as those concerning draft, medical problems, family and personal religious conflicts. However, does the gay community at-large support the SCSH and use its services?

"There are at least 50,000 homosexuals living in the Seattle-Tacoma-Everett area, using Kinsey's statistics," says Antonsen. "These people have been conditioned to hide or suppress their homosexuality in face of repression and disgust by the society. Anonymity is required for survival in a straight society. It may take years for some of these people when in need of

Approximately 800 telephone calls have been logged by the SCSH since September. Not all the calls have been for counseling. People moving into the Seattle area or visitors on business or vacation will call to enquire about local gay bars or other social activities in the gay community. The number of calls has increased in the last two months as advertisements have been run in the two major Seattle daily newspapers.

The typical caller who eventually seeks counseling is white, male, middle-class, and 27 years old. The individual is occasionally married with several children. In most cases, the person is not "obviously homosexual," and is having difficulty maintaining a heterosexual front.

"These people have been conditioned to hide or suppress their homosexuality in face of repression and disgust by the society. Anonymity is required for survival in a straight society. It may take years for some of these people, when in need of counseling, to overcome their fears and frustrations to even reveal themselves for counseling. But I am encouraged that so many gay persons have sought us out, and that we have been of some assistance to them."

"Most homosexuals want to be in the open in the relationship with society," says Roesler, "but to do so would invite disaster—loss of job, loss of friends, cancelled insurance, a poor credit rating, perhaps even being disowned by their families. Even today, when there appears to be a more enlightened attitude in a straight society toward the homosexual, the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage is very strong. However, I think the establishment of the SCSH is a highly constructive step towards bringing the two groups together for better understanding. It is our hope that the SCSH will continue to be available to both the homosexual and heterosexual community."