

## Seattle Counseling Services: a place you can go



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by Katherine Grant-Bourne

Seattle Counseling Service's (SCS) Counseling and Information Referral Lines are staffed by volunteers. Doug Fisher is interested in putting out the word that more volunteers are needed. They will receive 35-40 hours of training to handle the position. Fisher is aiming to do a training at the end of June.

The training will cover the following areas: basic counseling skills, crisis intervention; suicide assessment; AIDS awareness; transvestite and transsexual issues; and, documentation of client con-

tact.

Volunteers get all kinds of calls in their once a week, three hour phone shifts. Often callers are making their first contact, exploration calls, they may be anywhere from high school age to middle-aged, married callers. The cloak of anonymity of the telephone is important to callers considering coming out of the closet. They also get a lot of transvestite, transsexual calls, calls with questions about AIDS, some calls threatening suicide, and occasionally, some crank calls.

Emergency Services has approximately 1,100 client contacts per month, which range from counseling calls to information and referral.

Fisher says, "For many, picking up the phone and dialing 329-8707 will be the first step in talking with someone about something they have held inside for a long, long time. They don't need someone to tell them what to do. They need someone to listen. For others, calling is simply a matter of finding out where to go to dance, eat, or meet whatever social need they have in mind. And, of course, there's a wide variety of caller requests and experiences in between. The work is unpredictable, sometimes it's call after call after call, other times the phone doesn't ring for hours."

Volunteers will receive job descriptions and applications. Those who follow through with the application will be interviewed. Volunteer requirements include: a willingness to learn new skills; an interest in at least one 3 hour shift per week and one consultation per month; a genuine interest and concern about issues that face the sexual minority community; a willingness to look at one's own issues and how they affect interactions with clients.

Fisher answered the question, why someone would want to do this kind of work? by saying, "everyone answers this question differently. For some it's a matter of wanting to make a contribution to the Gay/ Lesbian community, a way of saying 'thanks' or 'I care.' Some use the experience to explore their interest in counseling and psychology. Invariably it is an avenue of growth, as we are forced to confront our own issues."

In her farewell statement as President of SCS Board of Directors, Diane St. Marie wrote, in assessment of SCS's acceptance as a United Way agency, "we must also thank the many volunteers who peopled the Emergency Services phone line, provided free counseling and care."

Fisher, the contact person for volunteers, can be reached by phone noon to six, Monday through Friday, at SCS, 329-8737 or 8707, or a volunteer can come by the office, 1505 Broadway.