

Contact Centre offers help to widow's group

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

If a group is formed to help recently widowed women in need of support, those doing the contacting would be more than welcome to train with volunteers for the Contact Centre according to a member of the Centre's executive.

Speaking to a meeting of members of the Georgetown Contacts for the Widowed, Rev. Walter Ridley said that if the group decides to form some type of contact group to help newly widowed women one of the first things these contact people will need to learn is how to listen, not only to what is said but "even to the silence between the words". Since this is also essential to volunteers manning the phones at the Contact Centre he felt that contact people for the widow's group might benefit from the training given Contact Centre volunteers if the widow's group becomes a reality.

NO ADVICE

Rev. Ridley said he could offer no advice on how the group should go about reaching out to new widows in the community since each person is an individual and their reaction may be different. While one widow may appreciate a telephone call offering to be a chauffeur because she doesn't drive, another might want to stand on her own feet and would resent intrusion into her life. Just how the initial contact was made would be of

great importance, he said, but the members of the group would have to figure out how to do it on their own.

He also warned the group that getting known around the community would take time and once the group is set up members mustn't get discouraged if they don't get many calls. When the Contact Centre first opened in November 1973 it was receiving only two or three calls a day. The centre now handles about 700 calls a month. He suggested that the group contact local clergymen and the funeral directors so that they could mention their existence to new widows and thus give them the opportunity of reaching out to the group if they felt the need for support.

He noted that being a volunteer offers rewards to the volunteer. The need to be needed is one of the basic human needs, he said, and thus the volunteers don't need to feel guilty if they find they get satisfaction out of being able to help.

"So what if they suddenly realize they aren't doing it purely out of dedication to helping people," he said. "If they didn't realize why they were doing it I'd be inclined to wonder if they should be volunteers."

Rev. Ridley said that the Contact Centre has recently set up a support committee to help the volunteers who are getting upset or discouraged. Volun-

teers may get just as upset over having no calls come in while they're on duty as they will over having a suicide call that requires great tact and several hours of effort to be able to help.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

The three basic principles followed at the Contact Centre, Rev. Ridley said, were preserving strict confidentiality, not judging callers, and not calling back even if a caller's telephone number is available.

Not only are the callers' identities and the subject of the calls kept strictly confidential, the identity of the people who man the centre phones is also not revealed. When people want to talk to someone they might be afraid to make the call if they thought a neighbour was going to answer the phone, Rev. Ridley said, therefore only the few people who have held executive positions with the Centre ever reveal their names to the public.

The volunteer is not there to give advice, he said. They don't judge the person who calls. They simply accept the situation as it

is and try to help the caller to work through his problem to his own solution.

Rev. Ridley also said that the volunteers often wish they knew the result of the calls and the solutions the callers work out. They never call back however.

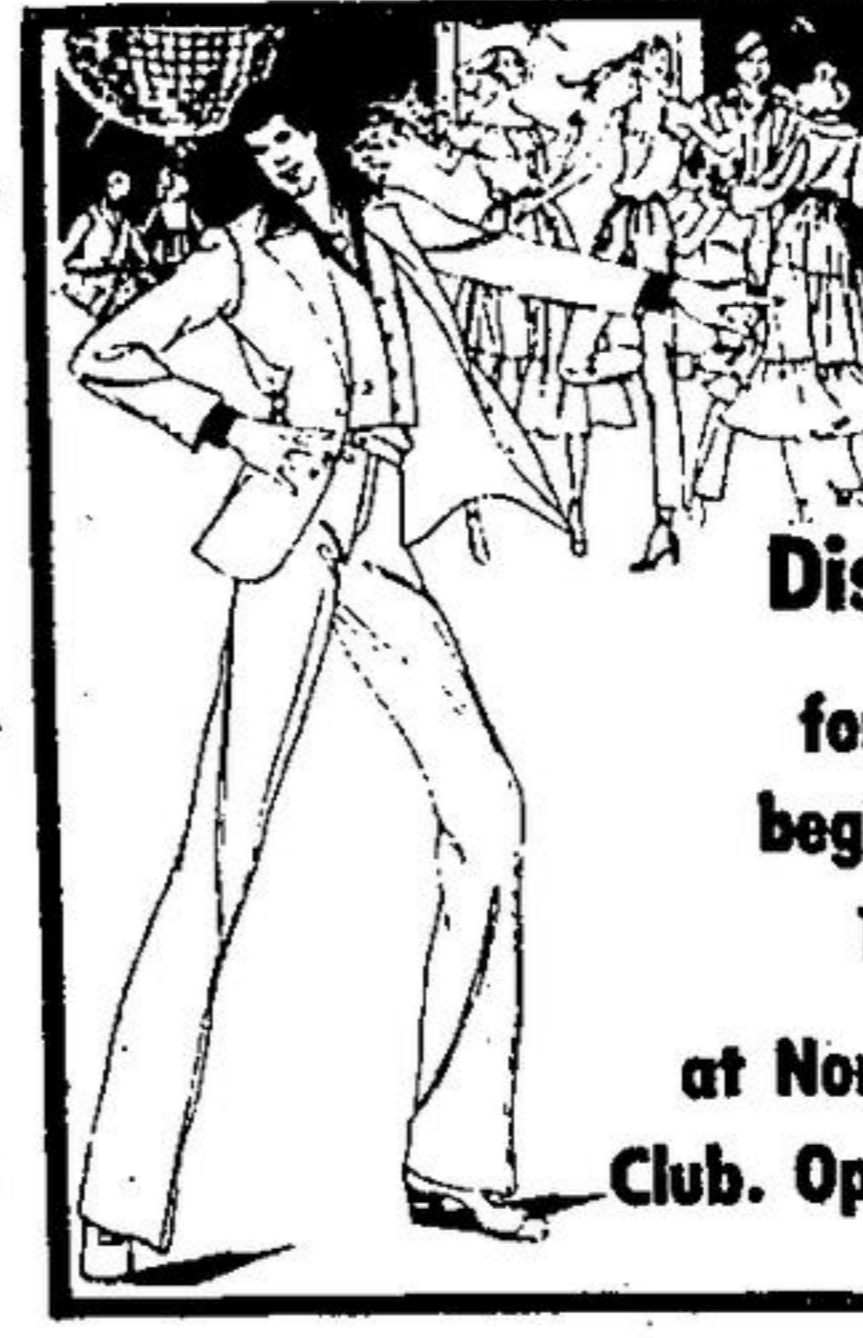
"We've discussed calling back," he said, "and a lot of people think we should. But so far we don't. It's a touchy thing. Today they may need you but tomorrow they want to stand on their own feet. It's almost as important to know when not to help as when to help."

Although they don't call the Centre does call a handful of elderly area residents who have no one to keep in regular contact with them. This arrangement is usually worked out with the Health Unit.

CALL ONCE

"We call them once or twice a day just to make sure they're all right," he said. "Then if we don't get an answer we call a neighbor or someone else who will go over and check that they're out, not sick."

The centre also acts as an answering service for other organizations such as Big Brothers and Alcoholics Anonymous and pass on the caller's number and message to someone in the organization who will then return the call. This would also be a way of passing messages to a support group for widows if one is set up, he suggested.



REV. WALTER RIDLEY

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Michael Hollett
Herald editor

An overview of Hydro hearing

The Alcott Arena booster club may never be the same after enduring eight days of testimony during the Ontario Municipal Board's hearings considering Ontario Hydro's application to put a hydro corridor through town.

The banquet hall-bar atop the Alcott arena was turned into a witness hall back on January 2 and was used by the OMB until the hearings wrapped up last Thursday. The only interruption of their weekday hearings was on January 5 when the OMB was thrown out in the afternoon so the welcome mat could be thrown out for the visiting Austrian National hockey team. And no, the Austrians weren't asked for their thoughts on 500,000 volt hydro towers.

SPORADIC VISITOR

As a sporadic visitor to the hearings, I noted a distinct change in atmosphere in the banquet hall as the hearings dragged on.

When the hearings opened the room was charged with all the anticipation of a crowd before a championship sporting event. Newspaper people jockeyed for the best spots to witness the proceedings, interested citizens packed the hall and the lawyers took great delight in playing to the crowd.

But by the end of the crowd had thinned, many newspapers including the Globe and Mail, had dropped out of covering the event and only the lawyers still seemed up for the event. And why shouldn't they when they're getting paid more than \$50 an hour.

When the hearings opened things were a lot more folksier as many farmers and casually clad members of the public sat in on the meetings.

NO WORK BOOTS

But as things wrapped up on Thursday the jeans and work boots had all but been eliminated and the lawyers' three piece suits ruled the fashion roost. (The pin stripe has been replaced by hound's tooth and tweed).

The lawyers are 'on' throughout the hearings, even when they aren't addressing the hearing officers. It's clear that the lawyers even have a studied way of sitting. They make a point of sitting with an earnest, righteous look on their faces on the off chance a hearing officer might cast a glance their way and realize that God is on that lawyer's side.

I sat in on some of Thursday's closing session and took in the summary remarks from the lawyers as they wrapped up their cases. Politeness is a key. The lawyers must express no overt distaste or ridicule for the opposite side. Instead, they politely and subtly try to make their 'associates' sound like idiots as they restate, to the opposing side's detriment, the points they have made during the hearings.

AIR CONTROLLERS

There were times during the hearings when the lawyers sounded like air traffic controllers as they guided listeners through reports, guiding them to a point on page 393, section A-2, sub-section one-niner.

Overseeing all of this were the hearing officers, Henry Stewart and William Dyer. These men have no muscles in their faces, they make no expressions.

Throughout the eight days neither man smiled, laughed, frowned or got angry. I don't think they are allowed, I think it's in their job description.

ALL-KNOWING

Every day of the hearing the two men loomed all-knowing over the hearings looking as though they were taking in every word and every statistic uttered for their benefit.

I don't for a minute believe the hearing officers retain even half of the information, no one could handle as many facts and figures as they are fed during an OMB information overdose. That's why they can't have expression on their faces. They might smile while someone is describing how the hydro wires will fry low-flying Canada geese, or look stern while someone is making a joke. It's safer to have no expression and look like you are retaining everything.

WERE ROUGHER

The hearings were rougher for some than others. No smoking was allowed in the hearing room and periodically a lawyer or reporter would run out the back door screaming "I can't take it anymore" only to return after a quick smoke in the foyer.

One lawyer from the Ministry of Energy seemed to have the best handle on the whole affair. She did macarame throughout the hearings. While she had enough time to knit a living room rug, she made Raggedy Ann pillow covers instead.

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