

Comment

We should all listen with our hearts

A young voice is heard on the telephone line. It could be anyone calling from anywhere. There is one certainty though—the caller is contemplating suicide.

This scenario is being played out far more frequently than ever before. One can only guess at the reasons but the views of a veteran crisis line volunteer shed some light on the mystery.

These desperate youths are losing hope. They have a grim vision of the future. They don't realize that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It appears today's problems will never go away.

About four years ago, Oakville Crisis Centre volunteers began visiting area high schools with their suicide prevention program. It's a positive approach aimed at raising self-esteem, enhancing communication skills and helping students deal with their anger.

Often the volunteer speakers are invited by students. Many times the students have chosen suicide as a topic for in-class discussions. It's obvious they're concerned and curious. It's certain that the volunteers would rather become involved with these young people through a prevention program instead of at a time when suicide becomes a serious consideration.

The province's 25 distress centres handle one-quarter of a million calls a year and of those, just four per cent are suicide related. Most callers, 21 per cent, according to Ontario Association of Distress Centres statistics, dial their local crisis lines because they are lonely.

Perhaps if these lonely people didn't have a good listener to call for a friendly, supportive chat, they would add to the suicide statistics.

About 3,000 calls to the Oakville Crisis Centre come from Milton each year. Some are repeat callers inflicted with what centre volunteer Stella Perkins calls "today's society's sickness"—loneliness.

The crisis line was established 14 years ago in reaction to teenage drug use. Today, alcohol has replaced drugs as a major problem among young callers. Volunteers manning the phone

Viewpoint

with JANE MULLER



take their share of calls from adults who can't cope with their drinking problems as well. And loneliness knows no bounds of age either.

One can picture an elderly caller, living in a high rise apartment, whose neighbours are strangers and whose friends and family have either died or are living in another city or town. But there are also young people who come home from school to an empty house. They need someone to share their problems with and can't wait for mom or dad to arrive home from work.

Sometimes they, like adults, don't want their problems known and that's why a crisis line service, which guarantees anonymity, thrives. Most organizations welcome growth and while the local crisis centre's staff must be pleased the service is well subscribed, its success is a sad comment.

So many people have no one to turn to in a time of crisis. When they call a crisis line they aren't getting advice, they are simply getting a non-judgemental listener. These people are trained as such and for Mrs. Perkins, that training changed her way of dealing with people in general.

We are taught at an early age how to talk but many never learn to listen. Mrs. Perkins became a better listener and found

that hearing cold hard facts and not listening to the feelings behind them was her former downfall.

"I had an attitude that was terribly British and formal. I'd listen and then immediately give an opinion. I don't do that any more."

Her new approach caught her family off guard and made them feel uncomfortable at first.

"I was in my 50s when I took my training. I discovered I was too judgemental. It's a real blow. I thought I knew everything," she recalls.

According to the local crisis centre's executive director, Sandy Beveridge, volunteers "love" the training. They learn skills they can use every day.

Between 40-50 of these skilled listeners are current crisis centre volunteers. Their motto is "we listen with our hearts." Volunteers are asked to take one four-hour shift a week or three a month. The lines are manned from mid-day to midnight, seven days a week.

Younger volunteers are specially trained to handle calls from youth and are on hand from 4-8 p.m. The youth line number is 844-4541. The regular crisis line number is 849-4541.

The fact that these volunteers don't offer advice, shouldn't give the impression that they sit silent at the other end of the telephone line. They will make suggestions while ensuring the caller bases any decisions on their own feelings.

Their training includes orientation to the many support services available in the community. Often callers have tried those avenues and really just need some forum to vent their feelings.

Hearing from depressed, lonely people, listening to problem after problem, could make clients out of the volunteers (but that doesn't happen). They support each other and are encouraged to leave the woes of their callers behind them after their shift ends.

They are able to maintain a balance, according to Mrs. Perkins and this is one area where she will offer advice. As a crisis line volunteer she says, "You can help. You can certainly make a difference."

Our Readers Write

Inhumane Life

Dear Editor: Hundreds of monkeys kept for breeding by Health and Welfare Canada (H&W) to supply Ottawa testing laboratories are forced to live an inhumane life of inactivity and boredom.

If these highly intelligent creatures were confined in similar conditions in a zoo, the public would be outraged. But the public, unfortunately, does not see how the more than 1100 government monkeys exist. They are deprived of their right to activities to meet behavioural and environmental needs.

In room after windowless room pairs of adult females, and their infants, are confined in stacked, small steel-barred cages in spaces intended for one animal. Some animals are singly housed and thus deprived of vital social interaction.

The once free adult animals were trapped in the Philippines, then brought to Canada where they will remain caged the rest of their lives—10 years or more. They will never again see the sun or breathe fresh air.

H&W adult monkeys have little or no opportunity to exercise and are showing signs of muscle atrophy. Many are pulling out their hair—a behavioural abnormality.

The converted government building holding the monkeys was not properly designed, nor is it large enough to house all offspring. Some young were transferred to another facility where many died from stress.

Reporters who have requested tours of the facility have been told new stringent medical tests are required which take three months. So the "public," which funds the centre, has been denied access to pictures or reports.

Please express your opinions about the H&W monkeys to the Hon. Jake Epp, Minister, Health and Welfare Canada, Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0K9, (no stamp required), with a copy to your local MP and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies.

STEPHANIE BROWN,
Chair, Experimental Animals Committee
Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
102-30 Concourse Gate
Nepean, Ontario K2E 7V7

Family Farms Dying

Dear Editor:

A copy of this letter to the Honourable Jack Riddell, Ontario Minister of Agriculture and Food was filed with *The Champion* for publication.

Agricultural rebates, subsidies and grants are a means of survival for Canadian farmers who have competed for years with foreign dumping of massively subsidized foodstuffs of every stripe. The inefficient Canadian farm today, regardless of acreage, is a relative rarity in a hard pressed industry. Considering the product is number one in order of human survival needs, government apathy in ensuring a "fair shake" for the smaller family operated farm exhibits a reckless and cavalier attitude.

In his letter to you of Jan. 21, 1988, Walt Elliot, M.P.P. for Halton North notes from my concerns earlier sent to you both that "several of my smaller produce farmers are experiencing frustration" concerning this program. I share their frustration as the smaller family farm operation is being forced out of business.

As you are doubtless aware, the assessment data upon which the current Farm Tax Rebate Program is based in this area is some eight years out of date and in our specific case, and doubtless others, inaction becomes the problem often against the smaller farm which has been forced to improve or innovate to successfully compete for higher subsidy qualifying requirements.

Since no other concrete suggestions were presented in your Dec. 10, 1987, letter to the

writer, allow me to offer several herewith. Firstly, that you amend the above Farm Tax Rebate to include a base level of 60 per cent consistent with the previous program ensuring that every qualifying farm will not suffer a massive net realty tax hike.

Secondly, many of our youth would prefer a healthful outdoors summer job on a farm if the pay remained competitive with other local industries. Your Youth Program subsidy of \$1.25 per hour has remained unchanged since 1983 while the farmer has been faced with a 75-100 per cent wage increase with little or negative real commodity prices in that interval. Remember also that the maligned family farm tends to be labour intensive. You should apply an immediate retroactive indexing scheme to that amount, something for which all levels of government show considerable skill.

DAVID A. MOFFAT,
RR 3 Georgetown

Dangerous Pursuit

This letter was sent to Halton Regional Chief of Police and a copy was filed with *The Champion* for publication.

Dear Editor:

As residents of Milton, living on Bell Street, we are most disturbed as the result of an incident which occurred on January 18 involving a Halton Police vehicle in pursuit of a motorcycle through a residential area. We are concerned with the officer's judgement and Department policy in respect to police pursuits through urban areas.

The incident related to us (per filed police statement) by Mrs. Danks of 424 Bell Street indicates that the police vehicle and motorcycle were both travelling at such speed that they were unable to negotiate the corner and both left the street, crossed the sidewalk, two front lawns, (narrowly missing a fire hydrant) and finally came to rest across the driveway of 433 Bell Street.

We are only too aware of the problems faced with motorcross bikes operated illegally on

these streets and in the adjacent woods behind Milton District High School. As I have contacted the police in the past regarding this problem, I can sympathize with the task of the police in their attempts to stop these individuals.

Unfortunately, this incident came dangerously close to causing death or serious injury to bystanders in the area. Had another car been rounding the corner in the opposite direction, a collision would have been unavoidable—as it was, Mrs. Danks' stationary car was narrowly missed by the chase vehicles. One can only imagine the results of this pursuit had it occurred 15 minutes later with children out from school or if a number of the street's pre-schoolers had been out playing.

The fact that the chase happened at a higher speed further up Bell Street where no sidewalks exist makes one wonder what the outcome would have been if the street was crowded with school children.

As parents of school-aged children, we can only hope that this officer's judgement in the speed of the pursuit within town is not typical of Regional Police—if it is, the next incident may very well end with tragic results. We look forward to your response.

JANET and JOHN HILTS
Bell St. Milton

Weedless Office

Dear Editor:

Hurrah for *The Champion* introducing the Weedless Office, if *The Champion* could do it anyone can. I am still considering myself a Miltonian, and know some of the long time staff members in the *Champion* office. There are some other offices in Milton with no smoking signs even for customers, for instance Koski Glass. I am writing articles on the subject of smoking, locally here and in my native language Finnish, out of town. My letters have also appeared in *The Champion*.

BILL KOSKI,
Fergus.

Pud

