

Community service

Distress Centre answers calls of lonely, depressed

Two years ago, Distress Centre Markham opened its telephone lines. Distress Centre volunteers provide active listening for people in a caring, empathetic, non-judgmental manner.

The centre is staffed by volunteers who have completed an extensive 12-week training course. Topics, presented by knowledgeable speakers, include active listening, grief, abuse, suicide and family problems. If you are interested in taking this course, call 882-9395.

The sun barely crests the horizon as the driver pulls into the parking spot. Outside, a light burns. In spirit, it's a light that burns 24 hours a day as a group of dedicated volunteers ensure that there is a compassionate, caring listener for anyone who needs to talk. This is Distress Centre Markham and what follows is a typical 24-hour period in the life of the distress centre and its volunteers.

The first worker this day is Joan, a Markham housewife and veteran volunteer. Soon after she arrives the phone rings. Ted is trying to stay sober. The hardest time of day

for him is the morning. When he was drinking, he would "down" a quarter of a bottle before he was able to go out and face the world. Talking with someone helps him to keep his resolve and face his job cold sober.

On hard days, he calls the distress centre and pours out his concerns to the non-judgmental listener on the other end of the phone. Now, he can face his day.

Over an hour goes by before the next call. A woman is crying. Joan doesn't say a thing, just lets the caller catch her breath. Caller, Debbie, has just sent her children off to school. She is in the middle of a separa-

Debbie has just sent her children to school. She is in the middle of a separation and is tremendously lonely.

tion and is tremendously lonely. She just needs to talk. No solutions are reached, but as Debbie shares her pain with Joan, she begins to realize that there are some choices available to her. Joan encourages her to call back again.

As Joan hangs up the phone, Daisy, a Unionville grandmother, arrives to take over. Her first caller is Joe, a young man in his early 20s who is unemployed.

He is angry at the world, including Daisy. After he has "blown off steam", he realizes that Daisy has listened compassionately and let him release his anger. There follows a productive hour of discussion, during which Daisy is able to give him several referrals to agencies which may be able to help him.

After a long period of quiet, the phone rings again. It is Kelly, a young woman who has been battling an unrequited love for the last year. Sometimes, she needs to be able to talk to someone who isn't close to her personally.

She finds that these conversations put her problem in bet-

ter perspective. Although she is still wrestling with the same problem, she is starting to feel

She tells him of emotional abuse that makes her want to end it all. She is too afraid to tell him her name or address.

that she may eventually solve it. By late afternoon, Angelo arrives

It was the wide range of training course subjects, including grief, loneliness, abuse and active listening, that appealed to him. However, after several shifts on the phones with a veteran worker, his confidence increased and he now looks forward to his shifts.

It is a busy shift for him. His first caller, Richard, has called before. Today, Richard is abusive.

After Angelo realizes that Richard has no intention of stopping the abuse and that no constructive result can come from this type of call, Angelo terminates the call. While the call is over, Angelo's response to it isn't.

His new-found confidence has taken a beating. He takes a few minutes talking over his feelings. (Please see page 7)

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