

Distress Centre volunteers listen well

(From page 5)

ings with a support worker. Some caring words, a cup of coffee and half a dozen deep breaths later, he's ready for more callers. Over the next three to six hours he will:

- provide details of the latest training course to two callers

- help a Markham woman report a flooded basement to the town

- share the frustrations of a 13 year old girl who is on the "outs" with her friends

- direct a frightened woman to the local abuse centre

- listen to the grief of a lonely widow

As the evening advances, a new worker takes over. Jack is a father of two, who runs his own business. Able to set his own hours, he's often free for extended overnight shifts.

Jack's shift will be occupied by a young woman in crisis. On her first call, she tentatively asks "Do you scream at people?" to which Jack responds "No, I listen to people."

During the two-hour call, Jack discovers that the young woman is from the "old country" and that her family has a subservient view of women.

She tells him of emotional abuse that makes her want to "end it all".

She is

t o o
afraid
to tell
him her
name or
where
she is
calling
from.

A s
t h e y
t a l k
h e r
v o i c e
b e g i n s
t o s l u r

and she's slower to respond. It's a race between Jack's ability to build the woman's trust and the effects of the drugs she finally admits to taking. The line goes dead.

Jack can only hope she'll call back. His wait is rewarded by a ringing telephone.

The first sound he hears is the sound of teeth chattering. Between hot and cold spells, she's been in the bathroom throwing up. Her name is Bonnie and she's 15. She's not so sure now that she wants to hurt herself.

Jack soothes and reassures her and finally, after 40 minutes, manages to get her name and address.

Keeping Bonnie on the line at all times, Jack asks the support worker for help.

He continues to talk to Bonnie until the ambulance arrives.

Jack hears voices and a woman comes on the line. "We're taking her to the hospital. I don't know you but whoever you are you did a good job." Jack smiles.

"All he did was listen. Someone taps him on the shoulder. Time for a shift change. Jack heads home to sleep but the phones never do."

It's a race between Jack's ability to build the woman's trust and the effects of the drugs she admits to taking.

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