

Depressed callers turn to Crisis Center

By ERIC GILMORE
Of the Emerald

It's late at night. A student, new to Eugene and the University, sits alone talking on the telephone. "I'm from Portland, and I don't know anybody here." He says he desperately needs a woman, but he hasn't been able to meet one. "I'm not doing well in school, and

it's hard for me to study because I'm so lonely here."

A woman, a student at the University, tries to talk on the telephone, but her violent crying makes it difficult. "My boyfriend left me. What am I going to do? I don't feel close to anybody else. It's really awful being lonely."

Both students are talking to Steve Schweitzer, director of the

University Crisis Center, and a graduate of the master's program in counseling at the University. The Crisis Center is a confidential night-time telephone counseling service used primarily by students, and the problems of the two callers mentioned above are typical of those Schweitzer hears most frequently. He says 50 per cent or more of the calls deal with

the problems of loneliness or broken relationships; the two problems are often interrelated.

And, says Schweitzer, when students are unable to bring their problems under control, their academic performance suffers greatly. It becomes very hard to survive at the University.

Schweitzer hopes that by talking to students who call with problems of loneliness and broken relationships, he can help them cope with the depression that hinders their performance in all normal activities, including academics.

"I remember once when I was getting divorced, and I was really depressed as hell," recalls Schweitzer. "I drove 35 miles just to do laundry with a friend — just to be with somebody. It was really important to be with somebody. So that's why we really exist, because it's really important for those people who don't have anybody to be able to call somebody."

The Crisis Center has been helping students, and a significant number of non-students, since its conception in 1969. It began with an all-volunteer staff, and was funded by "whoever had a little extra money in the budget," says Schweitzer. Now, there are four paid staff members, and an \$8,500 budget com-

perencing these problems.

"The first thing that we do when someone calls is empathize," Schweitzer explains. "We let them know that we hear them hurting, but we don't give them pity."

The purpose of the empathy is to create an atmosphere in which a productive counseling session can occur. According to Schweitzer, the student usually begins to think, "Hey, this person really knows how badly I feel — maybe he can help."

Now, the actual problem is tackled. Schweitzer restructures the problem so the student can see it in a different, more positive light. "They see only one aspect of their problem. It's a very narrow view, and we're trying to broaden it."

"We're there to counsel people," Schweitzer states, "not to just dump them off on others, and we never say to anybody, 'You should go into counseling or you should go to the doctor.' But, on occasion, if we've been talking for a long time, and it sounds like they need a lot of work, and they want to see somebody, we'll ask if they've ever considered going to the Counseling Center. That's our primary referral place, and in fact, if somebody calls the Crisis Center in the daytime, the calls are forwarded over there."

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ing from students' incidental fees and fees to the Student Health Center.

The Crisis Center handles a relatively low volume of calls, Schweitzer says. The most calls ever answered in one night was 12, but normally they receive fewer than five calls per night. The calls deal with "just about anything any person would ever have a problem with."

One man had both a drug and a marriage problem, and was contemplating suicide. Schweitzer says one of every four callers is contemplating suicide. A senior woman feared leaving school and having to find a job. One man, a freshman, had grade problems and was worried about not living up to his parents' expectations. A woman wanted to know where she could get abortion counseling.

How does Schweitzer actually go about helping the students who call the Crisis Center?

Basically, he follows a few flexible guidelines. He believes these guidelines can also be used successfully by non-professionals who want to help friends ex-

Schweitzer and his staff have a general policy of not making "house calls," but they do make some exceptions. Schweitzer has gone out to "talk someone down from a bad drug trip," and has gone to the dormitories to help a girl who had slashed her wrists.

Schweitzer emphasizes that although he suggests and discusses alternatives with callers, he does not make final decisions. Making decisions for the student creates a situation of dependency, and doesn't improve the student's ability to cope with the problem. He tells the caller, "It's very important to learn to make your own decisions and take responsibility for the consequences — you won't die."

One woman who called the Crisis Center after separating from her husband says she "was so lonely she didn't feel she could go on." According to her, Schweitzer empathized, restructured her problem and discussed alternatives.

"I called back later to let him know that he helped. I feel better about where my life is."

Bees attack Argentinians

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Descendants of vicious African bees that escaped from a Brazilian laboratory in 1957 have made their first reported attack of the new year, stinging 10 Argentinians Tuesday.

The attack, second in six days, was reported in San Juan Province, 700 miles west of Buenos Aires. Police said the victims were treated in hospitals for multiple stings.

Last Wednesday, a bee swarm seriously injured a man and killed a horse in the city of La Banda, 700 miles north of the capital.

The bees are an African variety some scientists contend is especially vicious because of millions of years of raids on its treetop honey hives.

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