

Crisis Center chief charts new course

By Jim Moore
Of the Emerald

A crisis doesn't have to reach epic proportions before the Crisis Center can help, says Laurel Singer, new director of the Crisis Center.

Many people try to work things out on their own because they don't think their problems are serious enough to warrant professional help or because they don't want other people to know they're having trouble coping, she says.

"A lot of people hear the words 'crisis line' and think the people who call must really have to have serious problems," says Singer, who has been working on a master's in counseling at the University since the fall of 1982.

But everyone faces situations they have trouble solving, she says.

"Most of the people in crises are normal people who just need a little bit of help. And with that help they can produce a lot of good," she says.

While some people wear casts and scars and other signs of physical damage like badges of courage, nobody likes to reveal the scars of the psyche, according to Singer, who received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Michigan State University in 1980.

"In our culture it's OK to be physically hurt but it's not OK to have psychological problems," she says.

Another reason people hide emotional problems is society's tendency to view such problems as weaknesses. But Singer disagrees with that conception.

"It takes a lot more strength to cry than hold it all in, dealing with emotions takes tremendous strength," according to Singer.

Changing students' attitudes about who should use the Center and why is Singer's primary goal in her new job. The Center is now proficient at helping those who have experienced a crisis or are in the midst of one. The next logical step is to help prevent crises altogether, she says.

"Once you have the organization structured so that you're helping the people who have been through a crisis, you can start moving to the next phase," says Singer, who worked at a crisis line in Muskegon, Mich.

She plans to accomplish this goal by increasing student awareness about who uses the crisis line and educating them in ways to prevent crises.

"You don't have to be suicidal, you don't have to be totally down on your luck, (but rather) just in a state of discomfort," to find help at the Crisis Center, she says.

Awareness can be increased by becoming more visible, Singer says. The Center will have a booth in the Street Faire. She also wants more flyers around campus.

Education for prevention is another story.

A crisis prevention conference, says Singer, would be perfect. She envisions coordinating with other centers in town, perhaps offering credit to attract students and presenting expert speakers.

But all this would take money — so another of Singer's goals is to raise funds.

She admits she isn't sure where the money will come from, but she says she has some new ideas to increase the Center's coffers that she doesn't yet want to discuss.

Other goals Singer has for the Center include increasing the both the training and education for people working there and research work in crisis areas.

If these objectives seem like a large task to tackle in one year, that's because they are. But unlike many University programs the Crisis Center has few personnel changes each year.

Singer plans to keep her position for at least two years. Her predecessor, Candy Reynolds, who will begin working at the Counseling Center as part of her doctorate program, held the job for three and one-half years.

Such continuity, especially in the director's position, has accounted for the Crisis Center's success and longevity.

Started in 1969, the Crisis Center preceded such other crisis intervention programs as the Drug Information Center and Rape Crisis Network and still receives

calls on those subjects. Most inquiries, though, are now of an interpersonal nature, according to Singer.

The Center's staff is trained to respond to all types of crises and a call to the 686-4488 hotline will be answered seven days a week, 24 hours a day. If necessary, a staff member will make a house call or refer the caller to a particular agency.

While Eugene is rich in crisis intervention programs, Singer says there is a need for all of them. In fact, she wishes to increase

cooperation between the many centers.

"I'd like to network with some of the other agencies in town to avoid overlap and increase communication between the agencies," she says.

Singer stresses the point that her many goals only reflect what she feels is the next phase in the growth of the Center, not differences with its past direction. She credits her success to the hard work of her predecessor.

"I'm not going to make changes as much as I'm going to expand

what's already being done. Candy has done an excellent job," Singer says.

She finds personal rewards in working for the Crisis Center.

"You see people make really big improvements in their lives, they're not perfect, but they've made a lot of changes and a lot of growth. It's real exciting and rewarding, it makes me say 'Ah, you certainly are glad you didn't go into engineering,'" Singer says.

No doubt everyone connected with the Crisis Center is glad she didn't go into engineering, too.

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