

Center offers healthy advice to students

By Lori Steinhauer
Of the Emerald

Steve Johnson says he had always been able to overcome his frustrations in the past. However, when he transferred to the University last term, Johnson says he found coping with change more difficult than ever.

In Eugene, Johnson, a junior marketing major, took his first dive into "dorm life" after living alone in a house during his first two years of college at the University of Idaho in his hometown. "Moving into a dorm was very hard for me to adjust to," he says.

Johnson says his stress escalated when he came home to the dorms from work. He would see and hear people running around the dorms, and he would feel burdened by the heap of homework he had to do. He longed for his family and friends back in Idaho — or at least for some new ones to confide in, here.

"I was at the breaking point. I desperately needed an out," he says.

Then Johnson came upon the University's student-run Health Education Center, on the first floor of the Student Health Center, and met with a Lifestyle Planning Program peer health adviser.

"It gave me an opportunity to talk to somebody when I had no one," Johnson says.

The Lifestyle Planning Program, which has won national recognition, was developed last spring by Martha Carey, former Health Educator at the Health Education Center. Last year, Carey received \$1,000 for the program proposal, which she entered in a nationwide contest for public college health plans.

Lifestyle Planning has expanded, and now has 15 advisers who lend support to students in need of advice on stress management, fitness prescription, sexuality and birth control, nutrition/weight control/eating disorders, sports nutrition and substance abuse, which was added to the program Feb. 18.

The Health Education Center also acquired its own telephone line on the same day, and now students can make appointments directly through Lifestyle Planning (686-4456), rather than going through the Student Health Center receptionists.

Students who are troubled by problems of their own, their friends' or their families' can set up a 45-minute appointment with a peer health adviser, to talk out their troubles and develop a plan to feel better. "We feel we can go above and beyond just being OK," says Steve Smith, co-coordinator of the



Photo by Ross Martin

April Minnich and Gaston Carlier, substance-abuse advisers at the University's Health Education Center, are two of the center's 15 student volunteers who provide advice and information to other students.

Lifestyle Planning Program. "We do a lot of goal-setting with people. We encourage people to make changes very slowly," he adds.

But, Smith emphasizes, "We're not professionals. We are students helping students."

Smith also points out that although the service is free, it can only be offered short-term because there are not enough advisers to offer long-term aid.

Freshman Kate Conroy has just finished five sessions with physical fitness adviser Ellen Feeney-Pellitere. Conroy wanted to knock off about 10 pounds, which she had been having problems getting rid of.

"She (the adviser) helped me define what type of activity was going to help and to evaluate my diet. I think I've gotten what I needed," Conroy says.

Conroy has added daily aerobic workouts to her regular weight-lifting program, and has cut her fat intake; she says she has lost about half of the weight.

Conroy says that in addition to helping her set goals, her adviser provided encouragement when her own motivation was down. "Ellen seemed really knowledgeable on it, and there was no drawback as far as being a peer," she adds.

Smith says peer health advising brings in about 20 to 25 students each week, especially students seeking ways to reduce stress. However, he says the program is still unknown to many. "We hear that every day: 'We didn't know you existed.'"

To become peer health advisers, students must be majoring in areas related to health, such as psychology, health education or recreation, and they must take Smith's three credit, one-term-long Peer Health Advising course — Health 407G — before

they can advise students. "We also try to get people who have had personal experiences so it adds a real personal touch," Smith says.

For example, April Minnich, a substance-abuse and nutrition adviser, is a 28-year-old sophomore, studying nutrition at the University, and a former cocaine addict. "Part of the reason I'm a drug counselor is because I have had a drug problem before," she says.

"I'm not here to tell people to stop taking drugs or stop drinking alcohol," Minnich says.

However, she says, "if you're waking up every morning feeling rotten, then you need help."

Individuals can only define that point for themselves, she says.

"We want to help students help themselves," Minnich says. "Adding on this drug and alcohol thing makes us a pretty rounded program."

Gaston Carlier, a senior at the University, is the other substance-abuse adviser. "We can be empathetic because we have been through the struggle," he says.

Johnson says peer health advising helped him view his situation objectively and devise some plans to reduce his stress. He quit worrying what the people around him were thinking, and focused on his own well-being, he says. Johnson quit his job, which he decided was too burdensome with his heavy class load, and he began to exercise more. He also started attending some campus lectures and going out with his friends from work more frequently to keep his social-life full and diversified.

"I think the peer health advising is absolutely vital," Johnson says.

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