

RCN closure leaves questions unanswered

Leftover funds may go to new center

By Carrie Dennett
Emerald Reporter

Last week's closure of the Rape Crisis Network created questions about why the center closed so suddenly, and what the future holds for crisis services in Lane County.

Brian Hoop, ASUO University Affairs Coordinator, said the groups that had funded the crisis center may set aside the unallocated funds for a new crisis center if one is developed.

The center had six financial supporters, and Hoop said almost every one is in favor of creating a new network.

The Incidental Fee Committee has already released to ASUO the \$11,766 that had previously been allocated to the center.

"Our funds are actually very fluid compared to the other groups," Hoop said. "They may be looking to us to fund some of the more immediate needs."

While the University Counseling Center, Whitebird Clinic and other local groups are trying to provide temporary services, long-term plans are being made to create a new rape crisis center, with a target start-up date of July 1.

"The larger issue that was brought up was whether a new service should stand alone ... or under the umbrella of another agency for security," Hoop said.

"There was concern that we insure more accountability to convince the community that rape crisis services are reliable and will be far-reaching into the future," he said.

The issue of reliability is one that prompted ASUO to call for an audit of the center's services, leading to a chain of events that ended with the network terminating its services to the ASUO.

The ASUO's inquiries have drawn both praise and criticism.

"I've had people tell me that they were disappointed that we did the review," said Kirk Bailey, ASUO co-president.

On the other hand, Hoop said that several groups, sponsors

included, have thanked ASUO for calling attention to some of the problems within the crisis center's organization.

While a statement made by the center's board of directors named the loss of ASUO funds as a major contributor to the closure, there is contention.

"I don't believe that the loss of ASUO funds was enough to put (the center) in the position where they had to close," Bailey said.

"A lot of folks had lost confidence in RCN, and when a group is under that much pressure, it's difficult to stay together," he said.

Kurt Landre, a RCN volunteer, said the loss of ASUO funding did have some impact. "If you start losing 10 percent of your funds, you start to close."

However, he said the ASUO was just doing its job.

"I think the ASUO's concerns were legitimate, but I disagree with how they went about it," Landre said.

"We received numerous complaints about callers not being able to get in touch with RCN and actually talk with someone," Bailey said.

"Individuals would call the crisis center (and leave a message), and would not get called back," he said. "That does not feed confidence."

Landre said the only such instances he knew of were when a return phone number was left, or in case of an emergency. He said that for months the center's directors, Gerry Stanley and Nancy McDowell, had been working the crisis line and doing community education by themselves.

This situation was created when 15 volunteers were fired last June, leaving RCN with new volunteers who had not completed enough training to work the crisis line themselves.

This reliance on Stanley and McDowell to perform many of the functions that would normally fall to volunteers created some doubt about the organization's stability.

"Do you have the staffing to supply the level of services that

is necessary?" was one of the questions posed, Bailey said.

Landre said that while the sudden shortage of trained volunteers put additional stress on Stanley and McDowell, the firing was necessary for the network to survive.

"Philosophically, Gerry and Nancy differed from the former volunteers," he said. "They felt they had to fire those volunteers because the organization would fold sooner if they did not."

Amy Lunch, who was hired shortly before the 15 volunteers were fired, agreed that it was a difficult situation.

"The organization has never been stable since I've been there," she said.

With only Stanley and McDowell being qualified to perform many of center's functions, it was difficult for them to find time to train new volunteers, Lunch said.

In retrospect, Lunch said she realizes that the volunteers were kept in the dark about much of the conflict with the ASUO.

"It's real difficult for us volunteers. We heard about the stuff with the ASUO three months ago, and we never heard about it after that," she said.

Lunch also said the volun-

teers were never told of ASUO's request for materials which the RCN claimed were confidential. These materials included a list of volunteers, financial records, locations of community education presentations, bylaws and job descriptions.

"They never came to us and asked if we minded having our names and addresses given to the ASUO," Lunch said, adding that, to her knowledge, only one volunteer would have objected to this request.

The volunteers also were not notified that the network had closed, instead finding out through the media, or by word of mouth.

"I'm very hurt, I'm very sad," Lunch said. "They were supposed to hold a meeting to discuss it with us."

"I think it was a mistake not to call the volunteers," Landre said, adding that he understands why no calls were made, because Stanley and McDowell probably were preoccupied with physically closing the RCN offices.

Both volunteers hope to see a new rape crisis line developed.

"I'm no longer resentful," Lunch said. "What I am sad that there is no longer a community service for people who were raped or abused."

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