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## Gay Hotline begins 16th year

*A pioneer of unstigmatized counseling, the Counseling Center for Sexual Minorities operates the Gay Hotline seven nights a week with volunteers.*

BY NESTOR PERALA

“Go ahead, the counselor is on the line.”

“Good evening. This is Mike. May I help you?”

Thus begins a typical conversation on the Gay Hotline, properly known as the Counseling Center for Sexual Minorities (CCSM), which this summer completed

## Profile

fifteen years of service to the community.

The Gay Hotline started in 1972 when the Second Foundation, a social-charitable organization for gay men and women, set up a counseling service for the gay community consisting of a telephone hotline and paraprofessional one-to-one counseling by the members of the Board of Directors. Later that year the program was badly in need of evaluation and reorganization, so recruiting of people outside the Second Foundation was begun. In January, 1973, the group decided to break all ties with the Second Foundation and become autonomous because they wanted a new and clearly defined public service image, professional standards, and nonprofit status. The group unanimously agreed that an unstigmatized counseling alternative to the traditional mental health approach was needed for sexual minorities. The name, Counseling Center for Sexual Minorities, was chosen after the Seattle model.

The most urgent need and most easily realized goal was determined to be an information, referral, and crisis intervention telephone hotline. A training session for future telephone listeners was begun in February, 1973. The first training session lasted four months and was attended by 20 people weekly. By March, articles of incorporation and by-laws were drawn up. Space was rented at the Northwest Hotline Facility at 1007 NW 23rd Avenue. Monthly bills for rent, phone, and publicity were paid by membership pledges, but by 1974 there was not enough money to meet expenses, so arrangements were made with the Doctors' Official Telephone Exchange for telephone listeners to work in their own homes with calls being patched through from the Exchange. This arrangement is still in effect.

From its beginning, CCSM has attempted to be of help to all sexual minorities. Its training sessions include information about cross-dressers. In 1974 a cross-dressers' rap group for transvestites and transsexuals began meeting at Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church. This group later developed into the Northwest Gender Alliance, the local cross-dressers' organization, which works with CCSM to be of service to this segment of the population.

From its original schedule of offering hotline service three nights a week, the Gay Hotline now operates seven evenings a week from 7:00 p.m. to 11 p.m. A typical evening's call may vary from, “I'm new in town, where are the bars?”



“What's happening in the gay community?” “I just had a gay experience; does that mean I'm gay?” to “My daughter has just announced she's gay; what can I do?” The answer to the last question ends up with the caller being referred to Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) which has one-to-one counseling and monthly meetings.

Although the hotline has Counseling Center in its title, it has not been able to offer the one-to-one counseling that the name states. The only time this has been possible was in 1975 when for four months funding was obtained from CETA Title II for three full-time paid employees. Extension of the funding by the City Council lost because of the opposition of Councilman Frank Ivancie.

Funding over the years has been difficult. Support has come from individual contributions, benefits put on by various organizations, and dues from members. Contributions are always welcomed.

Because of normal attrition due to job changes, moving, etc., there is always a need for new hotline workers. Several times a year weekend training sessions are held. Those interested should call the hotline number, 228-6785. Training includes actual practice in answering the calls, information about the gay community in Portland, how to discuss typical calls about being lonely and depressed, problems with one's lover or about finding a partner, feelings of guilt and low self-esteem, problems about coming out, masturbation, fetishism, problems of parenting, cross-dressing, etc. Up-to-date referrals are made to professionals such as doctors and lawyers who are not necessarily gay, but who are understanding of gay problems.

Fifteen years of serving the community has been made possible by the hard work and persistence of dedicated volunteers who give of their time and energy. The Gay Hotline, CCSM, looks forward to many more years of service.