

Switchboard Corps Of Volunteers Now Numbers 40

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sionals. I provide two others. We also receive training from the Metrolina AIDS Project. As I mentioned before, our sessions change to reflect the needs of the community. As we receive a larger percentage of calls from married men or transvestites (both gay and straight), we adjust our training to reflect those needs.

Q-Notes: Do you see a lot of turn-over in volunteers?

John: We have a very stable group. Howard, who helped start the Switchboard, was still with us until he moved to New York in late September. I would say the average stay is about two years. That takes into consideration people who move away as well. We're very pleased.

Q-Notes: Are the volunteers counselors?

John: We do peer counseling. Our training sessions help prepare our volunteers to know what they can and cannot deal with personally. If a problem is too difficult for the operator to deal with, the caller will be referred to someone who has the necessary skills.

Q-Notes: How many operators does it take to run the Switchboard?

John: We have about 40 at present. We just trained nine new operators. This has permitted us to be on line seven nights a week. It looks like we can maintain that now. But we can use more. I would like to see us have about 15 more people. That way, no one would be asked to take a weekend night more than once a year in addition to being on the line one night a month.

Q-Notes: Do you have many women involved?

John: We have some, but not as many as we would like. We encourage the women of our community to volunteer to work with us. We hope our new women's group (see article in this issue about *Queen City Friends*) will encourage participation by the lesbian community. We need them.

Q-Notes: You have been very busy. How does the Switchboard pay its bills?

John: We have a host organization that provides the space for the phone line. This in itself is a tremendous help. Also, QCC, though we are not a part of them, has provided generous funding for the telephone bill. Right now QCC cannot make a firm commitment for the total bill, so we are in need of private donations. We can accept tax deductible donations designated for the Switchboard through QCC.

Q-Notes: How is the switchboard organized?

John: The Switchboard is run by G&L

Associates, a non-profit unincorporated group. There is a volunteer steering committee that works with the current director to make sure things run smoothly. Everyone works on a voluntary basis.

Q-Notes: Things seem to be going well right now. To what can you attribute the success?

John: First, to the hard work provided by our volunteers. Also, we are doing everything possible to get the telephone number out. But all areas of the gay community are growing. A few years ago the only support group in town was Acceptance. Now, there are special interest groups for nearly everyone.

Q-Notes: What about the future?

John: I mentioned the women's group which is forming. We are also forming a support group for persons dealing with same-sex attraction (see *Mark Drum's column on the back page*). This isn't exactly a gay support group. We have seen a need for persons to get together with a professional to help them deal with this issue, so that they can make appropriate decisions about their lives. In October, the steering committee is having a meeting to discuss further long-range plans. The growth in the number of calls we receive requires that we be well prepared for a busy future.

Q-Notes: Your enthusiasm for your work is apparent!

John: I love the Switchboard. I'm absolutely having a blast working with the volunteers. You get direct feedback for your work each night. The volunteers are wonderful, too. I also love the administrative part. I have been given the opportunity to learn some people skills and work with people whom I would never have met without this work. It's exciting to feel a part of the energy of what is taking place in Charlotte's gay community right now.

Q-Notes: What do you need from the community?

John: One thing we always need is emotional support. As I have said, we are not a high visibility group due to the confidential nature of the organization, yet it is one of the most important for a strong community. We can use contributions and publicity. People never know when they will need the resources of the Switchboard. We can still use volunteers and would like to hear from persons who feel that they could help us out in any way.

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