

# Switchboard Helps Callers

## SPECIAL SWITCHBOARD REPORT

"I'm in town for the night. Where are the gay bars?"

If ever you've been in a strange town wanting to socialize, you know the great feeling you get when the phone book actually lists something gay or lesbian.

Hundreds of callers talked with the people who staffed the Gay/Lesbian Switchboard of Charlotte (listed just like that in the Southern Bell phone book) in 1983. The majority were calls asking for bar information.

Providing facts about bars, organizations, gay/lesbian religious groups, doctors, lawyers and other such information is one of the major functions of the switchboard.

There were also the calls from people desperately needing help.

Example: "I'm just 17 and I know I'm gay.

But I don't know where to meet people like me. What can I do?"

Or:

"It's a relief reaching someone I can talk to. I'm married and have two children. I just turned 42 and if I don't do something, I'm going to go crazy. You see, I'm gay. I feel trapped."

Lending a sympathetic ear to someone who needs to talk out their problems is the other major switchboard function.

Unfortunately, Charlotte's switchboard has suffered an erratic year and could be doing a much more thorough job of providing those needed answers and willing-to-listen ears.

The switchboard had seven new volunteer trainees in 1983 with a total of 26 active volunteers in August from the total of 100-

plus trained since the service began three years ago. Yet, so many of the trained counselors moved out of town, experienced school or job conflicts, or simply chose not to serve that the phone line during the latter part of 1983 was staffed far too few nights out of the week — sometime only once or twice.

So many more people could be helped than are being helped. When it was staffed seven nights a week, the switchboard averaged 100 to 120 calls per month with an increasingly large volume last summer of calls about AIDS. But it takes someone on the answering end of the line to make the Switchboard work.

The situation now is that less than a handful of dedicated individuals are keeping the switchboard going. They plan to dog it out until they reach the goal of a continuous supply of trained volunteers each giving one night (7-11 p.m.) a month for switchboard duty.

It only takes 12 people to form a training class. And the classes can be tailored to last from four weeks to 11. If you want to help, call the switchboard and by all means leave your name and number on the tape. One of the few volunteers will get in touch with you.

If you already have training in telephone peer counseling, call the switchboard and leave word. You will be most appreciated.

The number: 525-6128.

## Join QCQ As Director Or Officer

If you've been wondering how to become a decision-maker with Queen City Quordinators, January will be the time to act.

Anyone may attend QCQ meetings and have a say in decisions. However, only board members may vote when decisions reach the voting stage.

Eight of the 12 board members will be chosen in January from among persons attending the first January meeting, and all concerned gay men and lesbians and their

friends are welcome to attend.

Then the eight new directors will join the four delegate directors representing MC-C/Charlotte, Acceptance, the Lambda Political Caucus and the Gay/Lesbian Switchboard of Charlotte in choosing a quordinator, assistant quordinator, secretary and treasurer from among the 12.

For more details, read the January issue of *Q-Notes*.

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