

Switchboard

Insight

The Daily Tar Heel

Ever expanding to help the young

The yellow frame house at 408 W. Rosemary St. is by no means an impressive sight. The house is old and worn down. The grass - what is left of it - is dying. And the interior isn't too pretty either.

But to those who work in that house and to those who call or go there for help, the shabby appearance makes absolutely no difference.

It is the home of Switchboard, a place where just about any young person can go for help.

Now in its second year of operation, Switchboard has been continually expanding its role in working with the young people of Chapel Hill - despite the fact that it has to make do with a budget of only \$15,000 to \$18,000 per year.

Switchboard was officially opened in the spring of 1970 by the Chapel Hill Drug Action Committee, a group of local citizens formed to combat the town's rising problems with heroin and hallucinogenic drugs.

In the beginning it was mainly a place for young people to call during bad trips or when they had taken an overdose of heroin.

Now, however, Switchboard is more than that.

Much more.

It is still the place for anyone with a drug problem to call, but such drug-related calls now compose only 15 percent of the 250 to 300 received per month, according to Buck Goldstein, who runs the service with his wife Kay, Meyer Dworsky and David Perry, all former UNC students.

Other services currently offered include problem pregnancy and contraceptive counseling, draft counseling, helping young people find jobs as well as a place to stay in Chapel Hill, running a soup kitchen five days a week (Mondays at the Newman Center, Tuesday through Friday at the Wesley Foundation) and operating a "crash pad" where young people passing through town can sleep a few nights.

Switchboard also helps people wishing to start new projects, such as the Chapel Hill Food Cooperative.

But the most important addition, however, is Switchboard's work with runaways, "one of the major things we do," according to Kay Goldstein.

Probably no one knows how the word gets out, but most of the teenage

runaways who arrive in Chapel Hill wind up at Switchboard sooner or later.

"We sit down and talk to them about their situation," Buck Goldstein said. "We tell them we have to notify the police that they're here. That's so we don't get closed down for harboring runaways."

After the police have been informed, Goldstein said, Switchboard staff members then normally try to persuade the runaway to return home unless problems exist that make it undesirable. In these cases the youth is usually referred to the Orange County Social Services.

In other cases in which a youth refuses to return home and is old enough that he cannot be made to, Switchboard normally helps him find a job and a place to stay.

Though its work with runaways is one of the most crucial services Switchboard provides, the results have not been all that great.

"Runaways are our biggest problem," Kay Goldstein said, "and we have the least success with them."

In their work with runaways - and in other areas as well - Buck Goldstein said Switchboard staff cooperates with local authorities and receives their cooperation in return.

"Our relationship with (Chapel Hill Police) Chief (William) Blake is fantastic," he said. "They normally give us several days to work with a kid before they move in."

He also praised the mental health center at North Carolina Memorial Hospital.

"When we have to go there, they work with the people we take to them," he said. "They help us out a lot."

According to Kay Goldstein, Switchboard also has a healthy working relationship with the Drug Action Committee, which serves as its board of directors.

"All the people on the board have really been cooperative," she said. "I can't say that we agree on everything, but we still get along with them."

The respect for the townpeople appears to be mutual.

"The Police Department was glad to see it happen," Blake said, referring to the formation of Switchboard. "There have been times when we've had our problems with them, but since Buck took over in May things have gone well."

Blake agreed that one of the best services provided by Switchboard is its work with runaways.

"Unless the parents push us," he said, "we try to give them time to work with the kids. They can do a better job than we can because the kids can relate to them better than to policemen."

Despite the respect it has gained in the community, however, Switchboard still needs funds. The money it receives now comes from the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen, the Community Chest and private donations, but it is not enough to pay the four full-time coordinators as well as the house manager, Robin Garrett, and still leave enough to continue the present expansion.

"We have enough money to operate on," Buck Goldstein said, "but if we had more, we could get a lot more accomplished."

At present, Switchboard has approximately 50 counselors who work in shifts to keep the service open 24 hours a day. Though, according to Dworsky, they have no problems finding volunteers - except during the summer and vacation periods - there is a problem with scheduling them so that someone is always there. At least two staff members sleep in the house every night to handle emergency calls.

The training program for prospective counselors normally consists of three sessions (although current staff members will also be going through an intensive in-service training program). The first session is devoted to general information about Switchboard, house regulations and the like, the second to practice in counseling techniques, and after new volunteers have spent five or six apprentice hours at the house, the third session is spent discussing their experience during their apprenticeship.

"Sometimes we have to screen people out," Buck Goldstein said, "but not very often. Usually when people come back for the third session, they want to work, and they're qualified."



Switchboard staff members meet weekly to discuss new counseling techniques, any problems that have arisen and new programs that might be initiated.

Volunteers used to be between the ages of 17 and 22, Goldstein said, but now some of them are as old as 50.

"I think people really dig the older people because they're far out," he said. "They're all pretty flexible, and they adapt really well. Sometimes they can do more than we can because they can take a kid home for a few nights."

Though some staffers have had experiences with drugs, he said, many have never used hallucinogenic drugs, and some have never used any drugs at all.

The key, according to Goldstein, is being able to relate to the person having the bad trip and being able to talk with him.

"Sometimes all a person needs is a little reassurance that he's okay," he said. "Other times we need to really sit down with him and talk for a while."

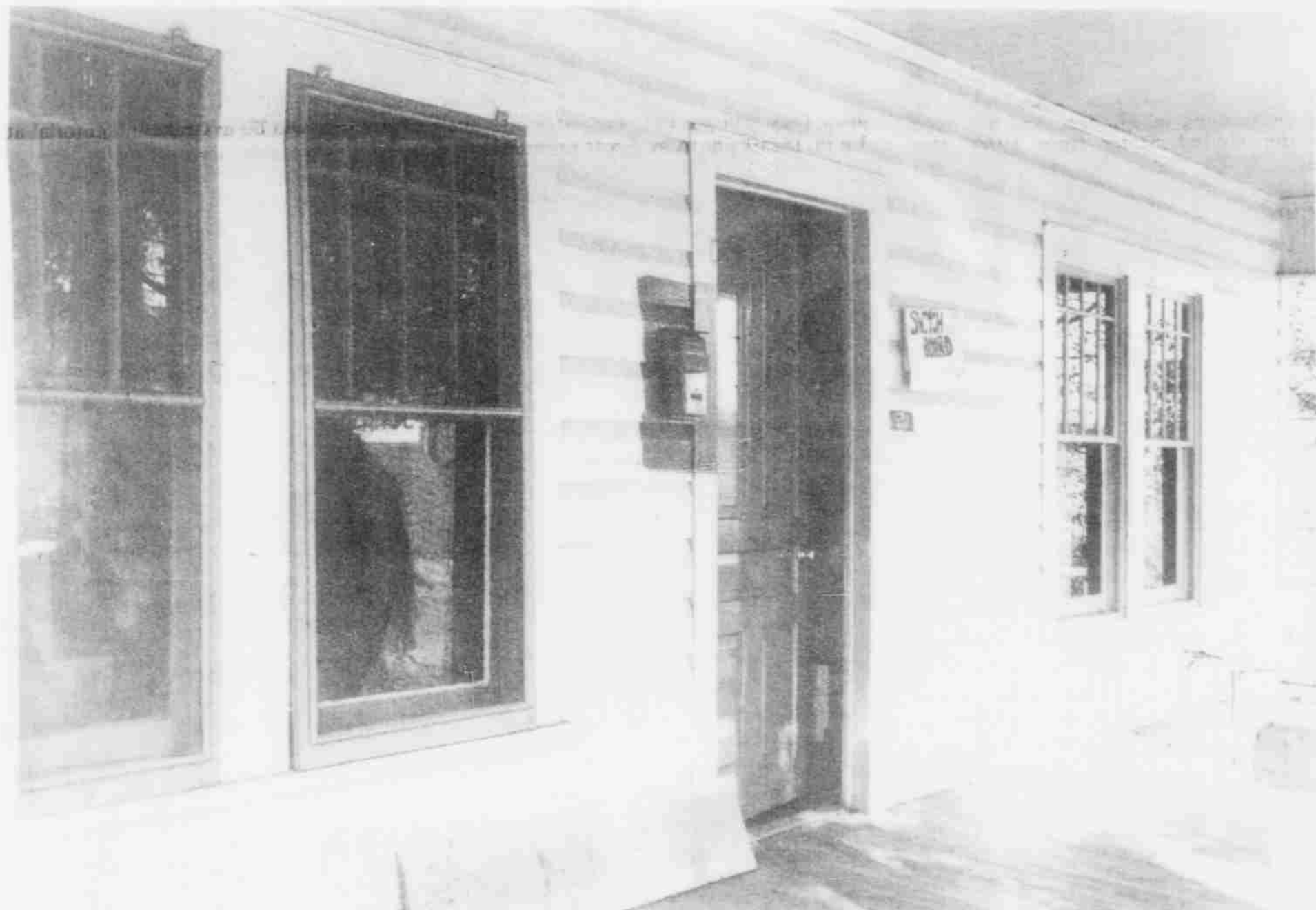
Goldstein added that Switchboard staff rarely meet real crisis situations, but when they do, she said, they can normally handle the situation themselves without taking the person to the hospital.

"If he doesn't have a medical problem," she said, "then that's definitely the last resort."

As word of Switchboard's successes have spread, the Goldsteins, Dworsky and Perry have been spending more and more time showing other institutions how to become more successful in working with young people.

Among the projects in which they are now participating are training centers for resident advisors at UNC and local probation officers in order to help them deal with certain problems they may have to face and to make them more responsive to the needs of young people.

Switchboard: 929-7177



The home of Switchboard at 408 W. Rosemary St. is always open for people with problems ranging from bad trips to just

needing a place to sleep for the night. At least two staff members sleep there every night to handle emergency calls.



Among the programs offered by Switchboard is a free soup kitchen five days a week. The kitchen is held at the Newman

Center on Mondays and at the Wesley Foundation Tuesday through Friday.



Kay and Buck Goldstein handle some of the routine calls to Switchboard as Meyer Dworski looks on. The three, along with

David Perry, all former UNC students, are the main coordinators for the project.