

# Agency there when phone rings

By Rich Swenson  
Staff writer

Common Ground's image has changed over the years — but its goal remains the same — to help people in times of crisis.

The Birmingham-based crisis intervention agency was established 15 years ago to help teenagers battle drug problems and deal with misbehaving parents.

But Common Ground has since matured and grown to become an integral part of the entire Oakland County community. The agency offers a wide range of services that include a 24-hour phone and person-to-person crisis intervention, legal and medical assistance, an information referral service and a crisis prevention program.

While the agency continues to serve

the needs of teenagers, its emphasis now is to provide a service for everyone in the community, regardless of age or the nature of the problem.

"Common Ground is available to help everyone," Bea Rose, development coordinator, said. "Our primary target group is Oakland County, but we have no guidelines. We don't ask questions — we're just here to help people."

CRISIS CENTER volunteers are at the phones around the clock, seeing distressed persons through a variety of problems. Whether a person is contemplating suicide, is depressed over the loss of a job or a loved one, or the victim or perpetrator of child or spouse abuse, qualified volunteers are there to help. And they're busier now than ever.

There's been an upturn in the economy, but many are still suffering disrup-

live lives," Rose said. "It's not better for everyone."

"We're seeing a decrease in calls from the unemployed, but we continue to see increases in very serious and intense calls."

Rose was especially concerned with suicide calls, which she said are up "20 to 25 percent." She said the agency expects to handle more than 10,000 calls from distressed persons in the coming year.

The professional and volunteer staff at Common Ground numbers some 350 persons, including doctors, lawyers, crisis center workers and other volunteers. But the agency is always looking for new faces.

"WE HAVE A good group of volunteers," Volunteer Coordinator Karen Conway said. "We need veterans to keep our program strong. But some turnover is healthy and natural."

Common Ground, at the northwest corner of Adams and Lincoln, currently has about 125 volunteers who serve in the crisis center.

They are carefully selected after going through a screening process. They must then complete an intensive 80-hour training program before tackling the problems of callers.

"The training program helps our volunteers to learn to respond to emotional stress," Conway said. "We're looking for people with human skills, organizational skills and good communication skills that can help the callers look at the problem they're facing."

"Emotional experiences cloud the issue, making it impossible for distressed persons to do their own problem solving."

"But one man's crisis is another man's challenge. The chore of our crisis workers is to get to know the caller well enough to help."

Crisis Center Director Sue Ankrum said people today are more willing to discuss such problems as rape, incest, child and drug abuse — problems that were hidden in the past.

"MEDIA INTEREST has allowed those problems to surface," she said. "And our society has made it more acceptable to talk about them. We presume people are well and that their crisis is a normal part of that person's life — and then we do what we can to help. It's very much a people-to-people service."

Domestic violence (spouse and child abuse), suicide and homicide calls make up about 50 percent of the calls the crisis center receives, Ankrum estimates. But where the majority of calls to the center used to come from teenagers, the majority of calls now come from people between the ages of 20 and 45. And the number of seniors requesting help is also on the rise.

Crisis intervention is but one of the many services Common Ground offers, however. A big emphasis has been placed on crisis prevention, with the recent reinstatement of the Alternatives Program.

The program, which includes a speakers bureau and cable TV projects, is an education program designed to steer people away from their problems. It gets them involved in positive projects that promote positive self-image and personal growth.

COMMON GROUND also provides medical and legal services, staffed by doctors and attorneys who have volunteered their services.

Persons interested in becoming a volunteer are invited to attend an orientation session at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the Birmingham crisis center facility. For more information, call Karen Conway at 645-1173.



Working in the crisis center are Jimmie Butler, left, Neida Linman, and Francelyn Dyjak.



GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Volunteer coordinator Karen Conway urges all persons interested in volunteering to attend an orientation session at 8 p.m. Wednesday at Common Ground.

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## Sport camps are offered

The Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department and Oakland Community College are co-sponsoring their second Instructional Sports Camps Program.

For registration information or more details, call parks and recreation at 471-6115 or the Orchard Ridge Campus Physical Education Department at 471-7553.

Offered on a one-week basis throughout the spring and summer, camps are designed for those age 11 and above. Sports camps for girls/women include basketball, volleyball, fast-pitch softball and cheerleading/pep.

While basketball and baseball are among the camps available to boys, co-ed camps in competitive golf, soccer, tennis, swimming and diving will also be offered.

All sports camps will be limited in size. Some groups will meet as soon as April.

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## CHOOSING A TAX PREPARER

by Charles H. Williams, C.P.A.



Who'll prepare your tax return this year? It's time to start choosing a professional, and to undertake the planning that may help you shelter some of your income from taxes.

If your income is fairly straightforward and deductible expenses minimal, you might satisfactorily use a short-form return and do it yourself or with the help of a tax preparer. But with more income, and more deductions, as the return becomes more complicated, you're going to want a tax professional.

Why? Because it's worth the difference to put your tax return in the hands of someone with the knowledge to find every likely loophole, and the experience to know which are acceptable. And as you reach the higher brackets, you'll get the advice you need on sheltering some income from taxes.

Some free help is available from the IRS. Revenue employees will answer your questions (but the tax court has challenged some of their answers) and prepare the simplest returns. There are also independent and chain tax preparers who pop up at tax season. Their workers may not be experienced enough to catch all legal deductions.

A certified public accountant can handle most complex returns and are familiar with shelters and investing. His or her tax know-how can save you more than the fee.

How do you choose a professional? Recommendations from satisfied clientele are one way, as are referrals from lawyers. Once a relationship is entered, the client will find his accountant helpful in making financial decisions all year round.

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It's a little thing to recognize that you are mortal and eventually going to die, quite another to make specific plans for that eventuality. Many people postpone estate planning because it is a subject they would rather not dwell on, or one which they and their family find morbid. Unfortunately, the results of such procrastination are generally disappointing and, on occasion, disastrous.

There is one aspect of estate planning which can be rather positive, and one in which much pleasure can be taken: the giving of gifts. Even though this is done during one's lifetime, it can be considered as part of estate planning because it can help significantly reduce the burden of taxes on one's estate.

For instance, an individual can make gifts of up to \$10,000 per year per donee without being obliged to pay any gift tax. Even beyond that, the rate of tax on gifts is lower than the rate of tax on estates.

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