

More than answers — the Answer

The Answer available to anyone

By COLIN CROMBIE
The success of the Answer lies in its continued use and support by the local community, said M. B. Flippen III, executive director and the main counselor of the Christian Counseling Center.

The Answer is a square white building located at 501 University Drive. In a recent interview, Flippen, a sociologist with a master's degree from Texas A&M University, said "Christian counseling" refers to the aim of the counseling offered.

"I don't consider religious affiliation at all," he added.

"Christian counseling considers the total individual and does more than just put out fires," Flippen said, comparing other counseling to "putting out fires" or solving problems as they occur.

The Answer is an autonomous local organization. It was established in 1972 because of a local need for positive and balanced counseling for emotional, spiritual and physical needs, Flippen said.

Eight full-time employees provide therapeutic and preventive services.

The therapy relates to relational problems concerning the family, marriage, runaway children and drug use and abuse, Flippen said. It also provides group psychology

and psychological intervention where the counselor helps the client to explore the alternatives of a solution that are not obvious, he said.

The preventive service is available to train counselors from other social services such as the Mental Health-Mental Retardation Center. Other preventive services are seminars for youth groups and parents and the Still Creek Christian Farm project on Sandy Point Road.

THE FARM is a place of summer employment for youths (most of them less than 16 years old) and it gives them a sense of responsibility and interaction with other people, an Answer secretary said. Flippen said there are plans to build a foster home, care and treatment facility at the farm.

The youths at the farm are paid from contributions. Small contributions of about \$10 to \$20 form the main source of income for the Answer. Contributors include clients and local churches.

Flippen refused to say what the annual budget of the Answer is. But he described it as "tight," and said each staff member receives less than \$1,000 per month.

The Answer makes no profits, Flippen said. In fact, it goes below cost in the price to a client, he added. For one counseling session, the cost to the Answer is \$25, but to

the client the cost is \$20.

Payment is not mandatory. Flippen said that last year 52 percent of the services were given free to the clients. "The Answer is here to provide a service to the community and the client's ability to pay is taken into account," he said.

The Answer serves around 45 clients in 80 appointments each month, the secretary said.

About 90 percent of the cases are referred by local physicians, teachers and ministers, Flippen said. Most clients are community residents and show a broad spectrum both in age and social background, he added.

FLIPPEN'S youngest client is a 4-year-old, but most are between ages 30 and 45, he said.

He said he has never recruited staff members. "They come (to work for the Answer) because they both know and see what's going on," he said. "We are here because we believe in what we're doing and we're competent."

He likened the staff's reasons to a religious calling. "The staff are strong as Christians," he said. "They believe a service to mankind is God's intent for them and that this is a part of their reason for being at the Answer."

"We believe seriously in praying for the situations that come up,"

Flippen added, although he pointed out that prayer was not usually a part of the counseling service.

FOR RELIGION and beliefs to be a part of counseling, the client should bring the subject up — not confronted with it, he said.

Flippen said the Answer has dealt with some parents who are concerned about the presence of some creeds in the area, such as Hare Krishna or the Unification Church.

The Answer, however, is not involved with deprogramming, the controversial method available to parents who wish to have their children renounce an unconventional religion.

"I don't think that deprogramming is ethical, and it's certainly not legal," Flippen said.

The Answer is phasing out its "Crisis Helpline" because it was too hard on the staff, he said. The service offered 24-hour emergency counseling.

But other counseling services of the Answer appear to be successful. The success, Flippen said, can be seen in the continuing referrals.

"If we weren't any good, they'd know it by now," he said.



An apple a day...

Battalion photo by Patti Pedrotte

Paul McGillicuddy, a freshman in general classes to enjoy an apple and relax on the studies from Houston, takes a break between grass.



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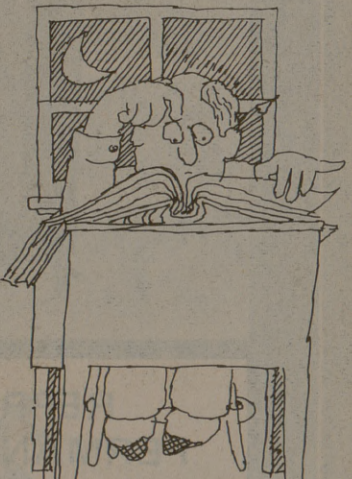
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