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Ex-prostitutes counsel youths still on the streets

AUSTIN (AP) — The best person to convince a 15-year-old prostitute that selling sex for money is not fun, glamorous or safe is a 19-year-old ex-prostitute.

At least that's the reasoning — and the hope — behind a fledgling program to bring former prostitutes together with working prostitutes, especially juveniles.

"We heard over and over that kids don't listen to social workers and counselors because we don't know what it's like being out on the street," said Karen Knox of the Police Department's Victim Assistance Program.

"But they will listen to somebody who's been out there," she said. "They will listen to an ex-prostitute. We decided also that we really shouldn't restrict it to juveniles. A lot are between

18 and 28, and we decided if any sincere person wanted help, that we would help them no matter what their age."

The ex-prostitutes, referred to as "peer counselors," are volunteers who have held legitimate jobs for several months. They meet Thursdays at 7 p.m. at Middle Earth, an East Austin runaway shelter, and are on call 24 hours.

They can be reached through the Austin Police Vice Detail, the Victim Assistance Program, Middle Earth, or through patrol officers carrying cards with phone numbers to call.

The program was formed by a juvenile prostitution task force, which included police, prosecutors, social workers and juvenile court officials.

The group began meeting last month, and has had successful, if sporadic, results, said Beth

Black, a social worker who acts as co-facilitator for the group.

"It's like the philosophy at AA (Alcoholics Anonymous): a recovering person is the best person to talk to someone who is still suffering from the disease," Black said. "We're not here to try to convince them. They don't even have to want to quit."

But most prostitutes want out, said one peer counselor during a recent group session.

"When I was working in the massage parlor, I saw lots of people trying to get out," she said. "I never saw one girl successfully get out of the business. Ever. It's so hard to get out. We're talking a lot of money here. We're talking usually drug habit, sometimes children, sometimes man's drug habit."

Handicapped

(Continued from page 1)

ing," he says. "I need to just double everything I've got."

Douglas, who uses the handicapped services office for everything from studying to shooting the breeze with his friends, says he is in favor of expanding the office.

"Right now I think it's needed," Douglas says. "If you ever go in there during finals week or mid-term time, you'll see it's really hard on the people taking tests and the people working in there."

"The congestion and the people going in and out is kind of a problem. I think expanding it would really be to the advantage of the students."

The office gives about 100 tests a week during midterms and finals, but because only two rooms are adapted for test-taking and making recordings, Lane says problems result when a test-taker and a volunteer reader need a room at the same time.

The first step in Powell's plans is to see what the University can do for the office. Powell hopes they will take care of the maintenance because he says his office can't afford it. If the University won't take care of the maintenance, he hopes he can relocate somewhere that has adequate space for his expansion.

The office can do an adequate job with what it has, but if his plans are approved, the office

would be more of an asset to handicapped students, Powell says as he turns to apologize to a student who had to stop taking a test in a quiet room so a volunteer reader could record a reading assignment for a blind student.

After getting what funding he can from the University, Powell says the office will try to supplement the rest.

The office is supplying the handicapped students with all the services they need, Powell says, but it just can't adequately get to everything that needs to be finished.

Pointing to a stack of about five tapes on his desk, Powell says, "We need a computer that we can dictate to. Those are supposed to be put on the word processor. There's just no way I can do it. It's just terribly time-consuming. Unfortunately, I've got a deaf student that needs that service and we just can't keep up with it. We have got to do something about that so this student can get his lectures put on paper so he can read them."

Powell says he is in the process of gathering material about different computers and visual enlargers that can be used to assist the handicapped students on campus. He says additions like these will improve and expand the services the office now has.

"I need specialized equipment, which is out there now, but it is going to take money to buy it and put it together," he says. "We've

got all kinds of needs like that that need to be met. The computer is going to be one of our answers if we can get the right equipment."

While Powell's immediate goals may be to get assistance from the University, the handicapped services office is receiving much of its help from volunteers in the University community.

A computer in the office, used for minor office tasks and transferring taped lectures to paper, was bought with funds raised by Alpha Phi Omega, an A&M service fraternity.

Patti Le Boutillier, chairman of APO's handicapped student services committee, says a fundraiser was held in Fall 1984 in which APO members pushed 10 empty wheelchairs from College Station to Houston. The service fraternity raised \$1,800, all of which was donated to Handicapped and Veteran Services.

The APO committee provides volunteers who perform a variety of services for the handicapped students. Working with handicapped services, the APO volunteers give tests to handicapped students when tests have to be taken outside the classroom setting and record book readings for blind students.

Le Boutillier says APO also paints curbs, curb cuts and handicap decals so wheelchair students can identify them easily.

Powell says APO provides the office with vital services and he's

not sure what he would do without them.

And several engineering departments provide mechanical and design services.

John Vittrup, an associate professor of engineering technology, says, "We've (engineering technology) come up with a couple of things from time to time where people have a need for a little special tool or something like that to hook onto a zipper or to button something. If they show us what they want, we can construct it for them."

Vittrup says engineering technology, although called on by the office only a few times a semester, has been working with handicapped services for several years and helps out whenever the need has the time and equipment.

John Grillo, a research associate for aerospace engineering, says he has done everything from tightening a loose screw on a wheelchair to working on the hydraulic lift in a handicapped services' van.

Grillo, who has worked as a staff engineer with United Cerebral Palsy, is familiar with making comfortable and functional adjustments for handicapped equipment. He says he sometimes does more involved repairs after work and on weekends.

Powell says, "None of this happened overnight. Over the years we have developed a working relationship with almost everybody on campus in terms of what handicapped people need."

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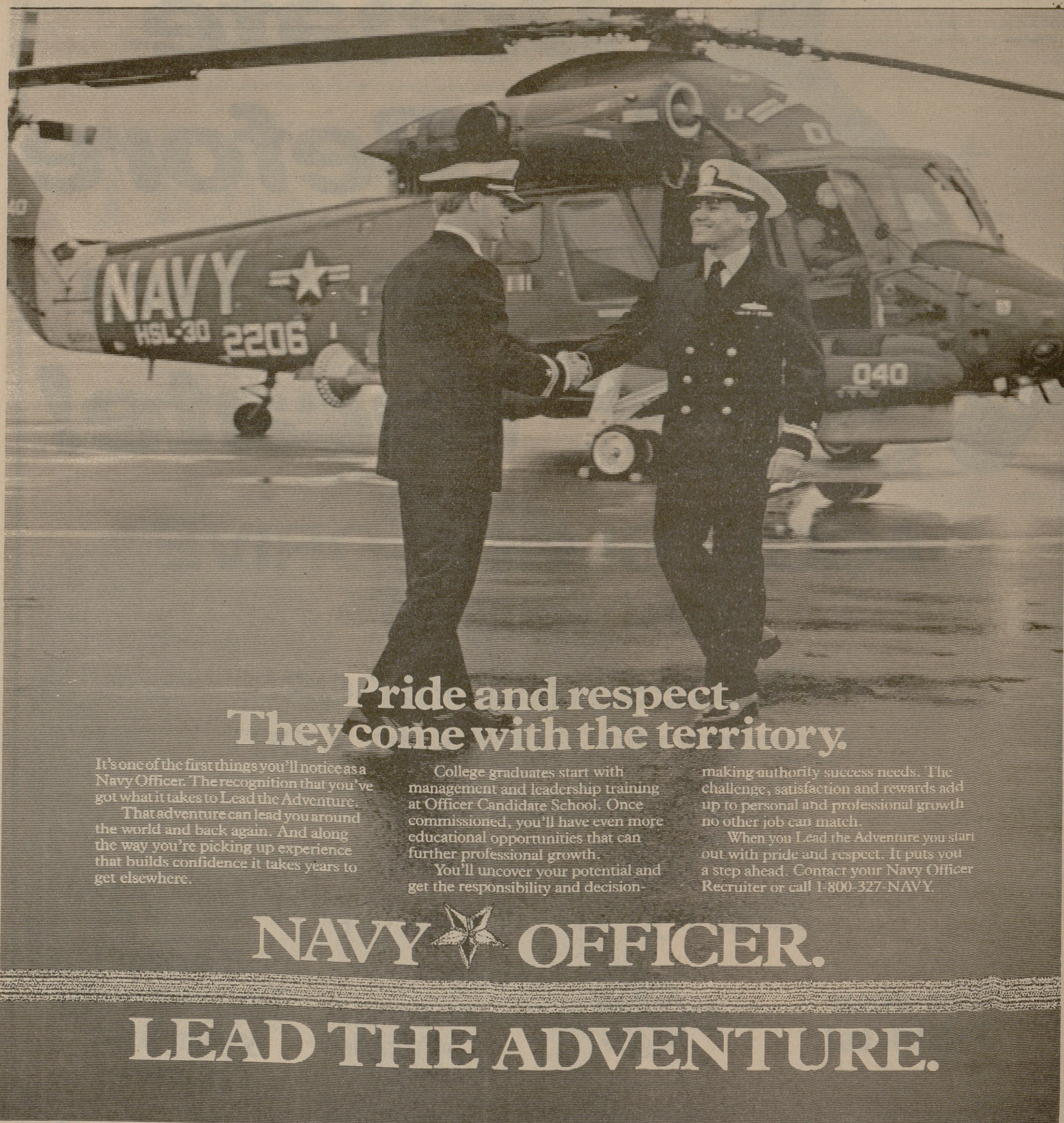
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