

Peer Helpers aid students in trouble

By CHARLOT M. DENMON
Staff Writer

"Confidentiality is the most important rule in our Peer Helpers program," Pat Russin, Dallas High School guidance counselor explained. "The identity of students who confide in their peers must not be revealed. It is only in the event of a critical crisis that an identity may be revealed, and then only to a professional," Russin said.

The Peer Helper Program at Dallas Senior High is in its second year. The membership has increased from 12 students last year to 16 this year. Last year the members were all seniors. This year, in order to ensure continuity, there are six sophomores, six juniors and four seniors. This allows sophomores, once selected, will be in the program for three years, juniors for two years.

Dallas is the first district in the Luzerne Intermediate Unit to have the program with the official approval of the school board.

Are the Peer Helpers successful? Does the program work? Comments from several of the students indicate that it does.

Kim Chapple, senior, said, "Peer Helpers is a good program. It is an outlet for persons with problems. The helpers are a support group, not a group to help professionally."

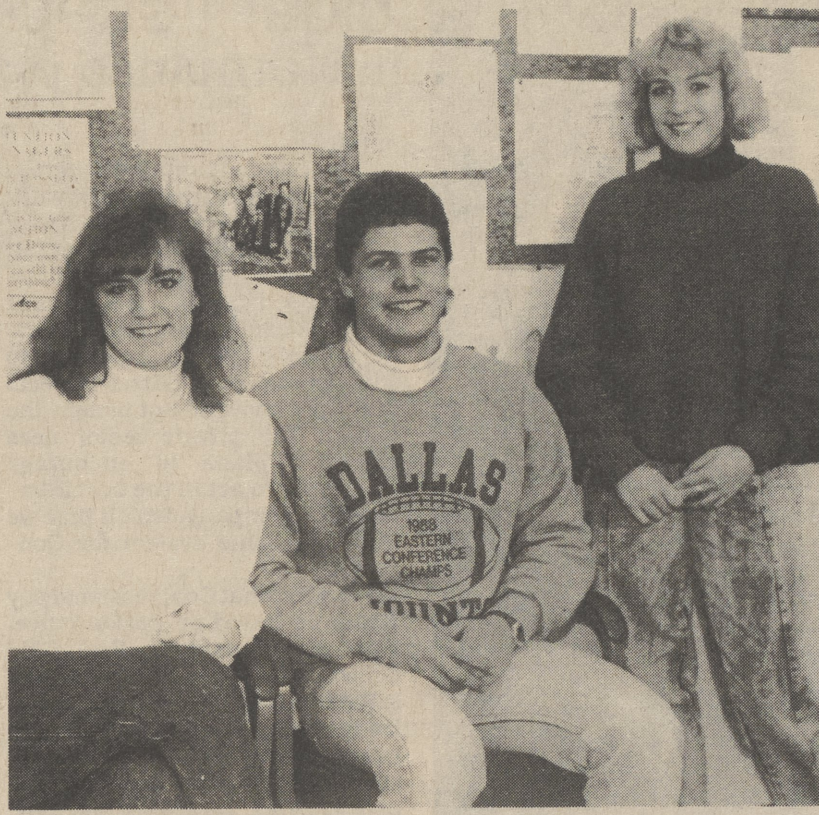
"We have had a lot of kids come to us we could help. We refer them to specialists for major problems. The fact that the other kids come to us proves it's working," junior Sam Jayne said.

"Kids like talking to other kids. They know peer helpers will keep it confidential and are always there to talk with them," sophomore Mary Lou Baines said.

This year, in addition to their confidential helping of their peers, the group has added a new dimension—doing some type of community service. They have reviewed three projects and are presently committed to an Easter project for children.

The helpers are actively involved with the other students, especially new students, helping them when they arrive at the high school, showing them the school, familiarizing them with activities and programs and sharing their confidence when necessary.

"The school is the only structured organization in many of these student's lives," Russin said.



PEER HELPERS—Students from each of the three grades at Dallas Senior High School are members of the Peer Helpers program. Above, from left, senior Kim Chapple, junior Sam Jayne and sophomore Mary Lou Baines, discuss how rewarding it is to work with their peers. (C.M. Denmon Photo)

"The fact that other kids come to us proves it's working"

Sam Jayne
Dallas High School Peer Helper

Members of the program spent two Sundays in August for training. They held discussion groups with professionals on drug and alcohol, mental health, and a variety of issues, discussing the pros and cons of each issue.

Pat Russin and Joan Makowski, home and school visitor, first proposed the Peer Helper Program in April of 1987, after recognizing the need for better communication among students having psychological, career, personal, family, or relationship problems.

They became aware that students under stress were turning to other students, not to family or teachers, and not always to ones who could offer good advice. They

recognized the need for a support group of some type to help troubled students.

Russin and Makowski learned of a conference in Schuylkill County which they attended and that is where the idea of the peer group originated. They learned that there were already more than 300 peer helpers in the state at that time.

Russin and Makowski prepared and submitted a proposal to the board for approval of the Peer Helper Program in the Dallas High School. They recommended that peer helpers be utilized as a support group for new students, for those with academic problems, those with low self-esteem and

those with social problems. They recommended also that the helpers be trained in communication and confidentiality concept. They proposed starting with six students - three males and three females - and three advisors, Russin, Makowski and one senior high male teacher.

Following an evaluation of the specific program by the board, the Peer Helper Program was approved, but the first year, 1987-1988, only seniors were in the group. The program was deemed very successful, but at the end of the year all of the seniors graduated so there was no one to continue the program. It was then the decision was made to include the three grade levels.

The first year advisors were Russin, Makowski, Charles Preece and Maureen Whalen. This year Jay Pope has replaced Preece because Preece had other commitments.

The unusual but good thing about the program is that all groups within the high school are represented. One Peer Helper has received a scholarship due to his work with the group.

All confidants are kept anonymous and some critical issues have been resolved since the beginning of the program.

The question helpers often face is, "How can you help someone if you have strong feelings just one way?"

Each member is required to complete an opinion poll and sign an intent of commitment signifying thoughtful consideration of what it means to be a peer helper. They also must testify that they understand they may be asked to leave the program if they purposely disregard their commitment. Teachers are also requested to give the advisors pertinent information for the program and parents are requested to give written permission for their son or daughter to become a peer helper.

How many students have been helped through the Peer Helpers? That's something not revealed to those on the outside. Names or numbers are never discussed inside or outside of meetings.

Members of the program have promised confidentiality and they are living up to their promise. Their responsibility is to help a person who confides in them and they have no intention of doing otherwise.

The program at Dallas High School has been a success to-date, the advisors will assure you of that. It is evidenced in the overall improvement among the students.

"We have moved our meetings to the evening this year because it was difficult for all members to attend during the day. The helpers meet on an average of twice a month for training and planning," Russin said.

Primary

(continued from page 1)

Litz has filed for the primary as have Republican incumbents Richardson and Landon. Camp and Wilson have chosen not to run for reelection. Unless someone had filed before the 4 p.m. deadline, Tuesday, March 7, the board will be in a worse position than in the last election when only five persons, Ernest Ashbridge, John George, Clarence Michael, Ellen Nagy and the late Albert Pisaneschi filed for the five open seats, each thus taking a seat on the board without opposition.

LITTLE OPPOSITION IN DALLAS TOWNSHIP

In Dallas Township last count Republican incumbent tax collector Leonard 'Pooch' Kozick and Republican incumbent supervisor Frank Wagner were running for reelection to their offices without opposition.

GAVIGAN FILES IN KINGSTON TOWNSHIP

Since Kingston Township has Home Rule government, its tax collector Janice Castellani is appointed but councilman Ed Price's term expires this year and Ben Franklin, appointed to fill the vacancy left by the recent death of Ambrose Gavigan, must also run for election to office. Both of these men have filed on the Republican ticket. They are opposed by Republicans Donald Gavigan, son of the late Ambrose Gavigan, and Bernie Novicki.

HOT CONTEST IN LAKE TOWNSHIP

In Lake Township where it is reported a strong taxpayers association has influenced elections in the past, there are three reported candidates for the seat on council now held by Fred Wisniewski, whose term is to expire this year. Wisniewski is running for reelection, Republicans Joseph Salla and Allan Updyke are also vying for the seat. Republican incumbent tax collector Ruth Orloski has declared her candidacy for reelection and as of Tuesday morning knew of no opposition.

MAJOR BOWS OUT IN LEHMAN TOWNSHIP

Republican tax collector Margaret Moyer of Lehman Township said Monday night she knew of no one opposing her in the primary unless someone filed Tuesday prior to 4 p.m. Alan Major, Republican

incumbent supervisor, is said not to have filed for reelection but Republican William Sorber has filed for the seat on the Lehman Township Council. Republican David Sutton has also filed and supposedly Democrat Jack Judge.

TWO CONTESTS IN FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP

Republican incumbent tax collector Joy Daubert is a candidate for reelection in Franklin Township and is opposed for the office by Republican Ruth Stair. Republican supervisor Timothy Dymond's term expires this year and he has filed for the primary as has Republican David Hillstolsky.

BATTLE FOR TAX COLLECTOR IN JACKSON

It appears that in Jackson Township Democrat incumbent tax collector Jackie Latosek will be opposed in the May primary by two persons, one of whom is said to be Republican Virginia Major. Supervisor Charles Cigarski, whose term expires this year, is reported to have filed for the primary but he will have opposition from Andrew Kasko and Andrew Chopyak. Jim Spencer has filed for the auditor position in Jackson Township.

BACK MOUNTAIN RESIDENTS AFTER COUNTY OFFICES

There are several Back Mountain residents who have filed in the May primary for county seats - some newcomers and others incumbents. Republican Joseph Sgarlat of Harveys Lake, a member of council, has filed for County Controller on the Republican ticket opposing Democrat incumbent Joseph Tirpak. George Gwilliam of Harveys Lake has filed on the Republican ticket for the office of Prothonotary opposing Democrat Hugh Duffy. Republican incumbent Martha Reese of Dallas, has filed for reelection to her position as jury commissioner. She is opposed by Republican Bruce Hanson of Harveys Lake. Democrat jury commissioner Daniel Blaine of Harveys Lake has filed for reelection. His opponents, if any, were not known at press time.

In the eight municipalities and the two school districts above, there may be a few positions hotly contested but for the most part, the May Primary has all the marks of being a quiet day at the polls.

Police report

DALLAS BOROUGH Break-in at Jersey Shore

Dallas Borough Patrolman William Norris investigated a burglary reported March 5 at the Jersey Shore Restaurant, Dallas.

The owner reported that sometime between 4 p.m., March 4 and 5 a.m., March 5, someone gained entry to the restaurant by breaking into the door facing Lake Street. Video games were broken and money removed from inside the games and the cash register was

broken into. Bowling alley break-in

Patrolman Charles Rauschkolb was called March 5 to Back Mountain Bowl, Route 415, Dallas, where Carla Finn, co-owner reported approximately \$1,000 had been taken. Finn told the officer she found the building had been entered through a window at the front of the building. Investigation revealed game machines had been entered and approximately \$800 removed and \$200 had been taken from a change machine and the cash register.

DALLAS TOWNSHIP DUI charged

As a result of a March 4 investigation, Dallas Township Patrolman Howard Kocher filed charges of driving under the influence against Christopher M. Schoen, 22, of Shale Drive, Whispering Falls, N. Y.



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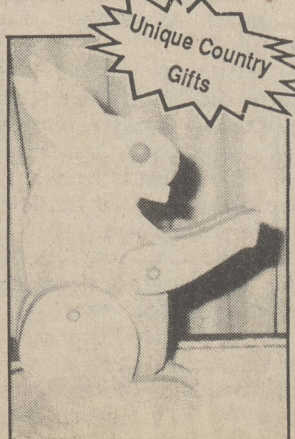


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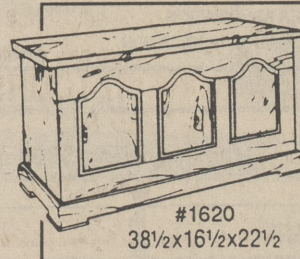
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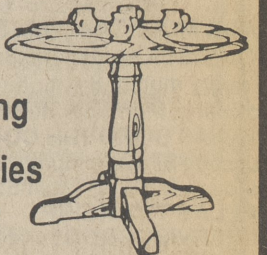
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