



A Special Edition Newsletter

I'm All Ears

Special Edition
4th Quarter 2003

Upcoming Events

Basketball Marathon
January 24th, 9:00am

New Volunteer Orientation
February 2nd-5th, 7:00-9:30pm, Wells Hall, MSU campus

February 7th, 1:00-3:30pm, Sparrow Professional Building, Lansing
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Listening Ear Flood Update

A burst pipe caused a flood that forced the first temporary closure in our nearly 35-year history. We had temporary offices set up within a matter of hours, and our phone service was restored after about 16 hours.

The flooding began at approximately 3 p.m. Saturday, December 13 with a drip that turned into a downpour and caused several ceiling tiles to collapse. Several volunteers and helpful community members braved a drenching and freezing cold weather to save our important documents and electronic devices. Much of our furniture and supplies were not salvageable, though.

Volunteers are currently answering phones at the office of Phone Bank Systems in East Lansing. Appointments with SAC clients are being held at Gateway Community Services in East Lansing. Only our drop-in service will be unavailable until we move back home. Our expected move-in date is January 31.



"We managed to stay open around the clock, even on holidays, for almost 35 years, and that's quite an amazing feat," Center Coordinator Joe Glass said. "Hopefully, though, we'll never have an interruption in our services again."

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Personal Accounts of the Flood by Listening Ear Volunteers



People experiencing crisis contact the Listening Ear every day, any time of the day or night; they have been doing so for nearly thirty-five years now. **The flood that happened at the Listening Ear, ironically, began when volunteers were there assisting others in crisis.** A parallel can be drawn between the flood crisis at the Listening Ear, and the crisis a caller usually experiences. Like most crises, the flood was an unanticipated event, shocking in its suddenness. Like our callers initially respond, we at the Listening Ear first reacted by denying the reality--this can't really be happening.

When reality sets
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The water started dripping at 3pm. There was only one crisis counselor on shift, as scheduling is always tight around the holidays. When she called me shortly after 3pm, the building fire alarm was going off and the water was limited to a slow drip in our conference room. Still, in my head was mental imagery of water dripping all over our office papers and computers, so I left my apartment right



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Having worked at the Listening Ear for 23 years, I have seen my share of organizational crises. **The recent flooding of our center is the most serious challenge to our continued service delivery that I have ever seen.** We have had power outages before that shut the phone lines down for several hours, but we continued to be able to service walk-ins. Whenever services have been disrupted there has been concern expressed about who isn't able to get through to the 24 hour crisis center. Our greatest concern has always been those in greatest need, especially those who are suicidal or recovering from violence.

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100th Training Program

February 19th-29th,
Wells Hall, MSU
Campus

Operation Freefall

April 24th, 2004

Schuler Book Days

35th Anniversary

Ear-B-Que

July 24th, 2004

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Despite the crisis, we are moving forward with several events planned for the new year. We plan to break the world record for the longest basketball marathon January 24 at a location still to be determined. Our 100th New Volunteer Training Program will be held February 19 through 29 at Wells Hall on MSU's campus. Orientations for the program will be 7 to 9:30 p.m. February 2, 3 and 5 at Wells Hall and 1 to 3:30 p.m. February 7 at Sparrow Professional Building in Lansing.

Also for the long term, plans are being made for a barbecue/picnic to celebrate our 35th Anniversary in July, the Lansing area's annual Take Back the Night in April and Bob's Run in June.

"We really want to thank everyone in the community who has helped us through the years and right now especially during our current crisis," Glass said.

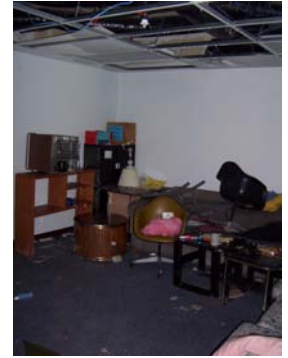
More Personal Accounts...

At this point, finishing up my sixth year at the Listening Ear, I have experienced both the joys and the challenges that go long with working in an all-volunteer, non-profit agency. Of all the hard times that we have experienced, I never could have foreseen us going through a flood. When Joe G., our Center Coordinator first called me, I honestly thought he was pulling my leg. He sounded pretty panicked, especially since, as I learned later, he was still in the beginning stages of the downpour. **It wasn't until we pulled into the Listening Ear parking lot and I saw everything of value to us sitting in our parking lot and a lot of very cold, wet people that I could really comprehend what was happening to us.** I have helped the Ear through two moves, but I had never seen anything like this before.

As word of the flood spread, despite the frigid temperatures outside, more and more volunteers and board members showed up at the scene. Many of us huddled together in the back of a Red Cross truck, offered support to each other and shared cell phones, staff lists and a phone book as we tried to make a plan of action. I was truly amazed at the way everyone pulled together to make things happen.

I have often heard that in times of crisis, you get a chance to truly see the depths of human kindness and compassion. The flood we experienced was no exception to this rule. While I feel blown away at the damage caused by the flood and the process of rebuilding our home, I feel lucky to be part of an organization filled with people who care so much about what we do.

—Alyssa B.



I was driving to the Listening Ear to fill out some papers that I forgot from the night before, and all I see are fire trucks and bright lights. Shocked, all I can do is drive by; the entrance was being blocked. So I call another volunteer to find out what was going on. "Oh, the Listening Ear flooded." What? Did I hear that right?

I turned my car around, and parked by the building. I see some D'Ears standing outside the building, looking shocked and sad. I had four of my friends with me, and we walked into the dark building. **The Listening Ear, in a matter of hours, turned into the Titanic.** There was water all over the ground, dripping from the ceiling, furniture ruined. I didn't even recognize the phone room.

The rest of the night involved moving the contents of the Ear to another volunteer's basement. It was a harsh reality to see our beautiful ceiling tiles being shoved into a corner. It may sound funny, but even something simple as the ceiling has memories attached to it. The Listening Ear, to me, is a place where we listen, to crisis calls and to each other. Our building may have been destroyed, but the people are still here. It doesn't matter where we are located. I love D'Ears; you guys are my favorite people.

— Michelle H. ("Lil Hoppy")

I had stopped by the Ear to take care of some business. When I walked in the door, someone ran past with a computer in his arms. Someone else yelled to me, "The building is flooding! We've got to get the computers out!" The downpour wasn't even at its worst then.

I wish I could remember what I was thinking, but I wasn't really thinking. I was just reacting. Someone told me I had a look on my face as if there was a baby being born and I had to save it. I didn't have a chance to think, though. I just kept running in and out, carrying whatever I could, trying to save everything. My wet jeans made my legs so heavy, reminding me of how out of shape I am, but there was no time to think, no time to stop for a breather.

I remember being scared that many sentimental artifacts would be lost. So many Ears past and present had created artwork and written in journals that I was certain would be destroyed by water damage. I was grateful, though, when I noticed complete strangers getting soaked with me trying to help us out. I regret not having the time to stop and thank them personally.

Later, I remember being so worried that we'd be out of service for an extended period. I was so excited when the phone finally rang at our temporary office many hours later. The Listening Ear was alive again, and I was incredibly proud to be a part of the group that saved it.

—Drew S.

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in as rapidly as it did during the flood, we don't have time to react on a feeling level. We get a rush of adrenaline that propels us out of our panic and inertia. Like our callers, we reached out for help in desperation, and relied upon whatever support became available to us. We reached out to those around us, and asked for assistance from complete strangers. Instead of remaining paralyzed, we became keenly aware of what was of most value to us, and made decisions quickly to preserve what we could of our lives at the Listening Ear. For in



many ways, we are a family to one another--a family of caring volunteers in service to the community.

We literally, in this case, felt flooded, but most callers feel flooded, in the figurative sense. We feel invaded, displaced, disrupted, and we experience major and minor losses associated with the event. We talk about the event, repeating details, to help us absorb the shock, and take in the event. That is what makes listening, empathizing and communicating so important at a time like this.

Throughout the crisis, we encourage our callers to trust themselves, and to develop whatever resources they have within them, to become empowered. We encourage them as well to trust in the resources within their community, and that is what we must continue to do ourselves, in order to overcome the conditions brought on by the flood crisis. What I feel most proud of, is that when the crisis descended upon us, and things were falling apart, the Listening Ear came together and met its priority to restore service to those even more in need than ourselves.

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away to make the short drive to the Ear.

When I arrived, the noise of the fire alarm was piercing my ears. The volunteer on shift showed me the drips in the conference room. Water was beginning to gather on the conference room table. Our crisis hotline rang, so being the dedicated counselor she is, the counselor on duty answered the phone. The volunteer must have been on the phone for only 3 minutes, but when she came back, she was horrified – the water was now expanding laterally to adjacent ceiling tiles. I became terrified as a second water source started dripping in the office. We carried everything we could see outside - service records, a laser printer, office documents, computer equipment... Water was pouring so profusely that we had to stop answering the crisis lines. When familiar faces started showing up, our urgency was so apparent that they didn't even ask what was going on. Water was now falling so quickly that simply taking a dash through our building would leave a runner soaking wet. It was so cold outside, that if it wasn't for our constant physical exertion, our clothes would have frozen like icicles.

By 4pm, there were no longer streams of water – there were waterfalls. The only thing that was left behind was furniture. Little equipment left the building without getting wet, most everything that left the building was soaked, even our expensive copy machine. At around 6pm, more board members were arriving, and we began to plan to switch our phones to another location. Although our crisis lines were down for the first time in 34 years of service, our friends in the community were quick to help us. Within the evening, we had found a new location.

We are currently serving our clients from two locations, and our office is in a third. Although the crisis was one of the worst experiences our organization has encountered, it will be looked back upon as yet another bump in the road that we were strong enough to endure. We are trained crisis counselors, and we have proven over and over that we can respond to any type of crisis by taking care of each other, problem solving, and mobilizing.

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This recent crisis was no different in the dismay that it raised, but the scope of the disruption was immense. Thus, to witness the tremendous resolve that allowed us to find a temporary space and get through the necessary obstacles to be back in service within 20 hours was awesome and remarkable. Our volunteer board and coordinators, as well as our very special staff, really came through. This has confirmed my pride in being a part of a very special organization.

Nevertheless, I know my



anxiety has been raised; and I am mindful that some very sentimental items may have been lost. I wrote a little play in 1984 about my sense of the Listening Ear. This was written in one of the center's Journals of Creative Communication (JCC). I kept a copy of it in my too-full mailbox at the center. So, on Sunday, as I was full of pride at working the second shift at the temporary location, I was full of concern for my written link to the past. Luckily, those who were consumed with very practical needs to save organizational materials were also empathic and responsive to my need to check on the contents of my mailbox. I thank them for their time and sensitivity to my sentimental needs.

I remain proud of this community of volunteers who, in a pinch, can maneuver through bureaucracies without losing the special connection of being a Listening Ear volunteer.

—Steve B.

(Training program of Winter, 1980)

I want to contribute to the flood recovery effort!

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↑\$60 ↑\$180
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Goldfish Dreams by
Jim Hines with a dona-
tion of \$100 or more!

Please Charge my Visa/MC \$ _____ Exp. Date: ___/___
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If charging to a credit card, please complete the below information using your credit card billing address.



Thank You!

Name _____

The Listening Ear
Crisis & Referral Center
313 W Grand River Ave
East Lansing, MI 48823

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

517.337.1717

E-mail _____

Please return to: The Listening Ear, 313 W. Grand River Ave, East Lansing MI 48823

Does your company offer a program that matches your donations to community non-profit organizations? Ask your employer's personnel/human resources department and if they do, let them know each time you make a donation to The Listening Ear. You will double your support of our mission, for free!



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