SUMMARY OF EXCHANGE

Belfast to Galway.

On Friday 10th November 1988 7 members of the present Lesbian Line Collective travelled to Galway by mini-bus and were met by members of the cork and Galway Lesbian Line Collectives. Accommodation was provided by members and friends of the Galway Lesbian Line Collective and a social gathering had been organised to enable participants to get to know each other.

The Workshops

The workshops began on Saturday morning in the --- Hall after a substantial breakfast had been provided for all women present.

The first workshop ws entitled Lesbians and Alcohol. This began with two very different and very moving accounts by two women of their 'relationship' with alcohol and their bitter and agonising journey to recovery after they had finally admitted their alcoholism to themselves. Because of their own experiences the women were in a position to highlight a number of facts which deserve considerable attention. The most salient points are: The ease with which the problem of alcoholism in women is negated by women themselves and by society at large; the high degree of alcoholism in lesbian women; the lack of support systems which pertain to women; the fact that for lesbian women most social events revolve around alcohol ie discos,pubs and parties and the fact that the statistics on women with alcohol problems suggest that the problem is on the increase.

The positive decisions which were made during the discussion on lesbians and alcohol were that we must recognise and realise that the problem of alcoholism does exist for many lesbian women and that we must not make assumptions during befriending sessions that all women do take a drink. There was general agreement as lesbian women we should make more of an effort to organise non-alcohol related events, and that we should take a more active part in highlighting or even organising the support systems available for women with alcohol related problems. As a first step towards this some lesbian line collectives suggested inviting a member of Alcoholics Anonymous to a lesbian line meeting.

The second workshop focussed on the difficulties of befriending in small communities. Since this is a problem which most of us face, it was a relief just to talk about some of the situations we have had to cope with. often a befriending will end years of isolation for a woman and given that situation it can be very easy for befriendees to develop a dependency on the new women she has just met. As a group we all realised the need to examine our befriending policies and the need to be firm about the degree of support which it is possible to give to the ever increasing number of

befriendees.

The first workshop of the afternoon was devoted to counselling and Training Policies. Belfast lesbian Line is at present formulating a training course which hopefully can be shared with the other lesbian line collectives. Since one of the Belfast Lesbian Line members has considerable experience of counselling skills, she presented key points to note when talking to women who may be phoning for the first time. The type of workshop is equally important for long term members of Lesbian

Line collectives and for newcomers since basic counselling skills must always be borne in mind. Also during this workshop, there was an emphasis on role play and this is extremely valuable in a group situation where not all of the women know each other well because it is useful to pick up points on different telephone techniques where the aim is to draw out relevant information from a new caller. Also by participating in role play it can help one to focus on ones own level of tolerance, acceptance and sensitivity to particular situations in which women can find themselves and it is essential to bear these points in mind as a lesbian line worker.

Another of the workshops was based on the difficulties which many women have when male/female transsexuals phone lesbian line. It has been noted in recent months that more transsexuals (male to female) have been phoning lesbian line with the desire to come to lesbian social events and meet lesbian women. It was pointed out that, as with lesbians, transsexuals are a minority group and we should not fall into the trap of ostracising transsexuals and treating them in a way that society often treats lesbian women because of lack of understanding of all that sexuality means.

A decision was made that all Lesbian Line Collectives should endeavour to find the telephone numbers of transsexual support groups and refer callers to these services.

The final workshop of the day was entitled "Recruitment and Selection". This workshop was organised because of the difficulties involved in deciding whether or not lesbian line collectives should be open collectives accepting all women who express an interest in working on the line or whether there should be recruitment criteria. Since the job of working on the phone lines and befriending new women has to be dealt with in a sensitive, caring and confidential manner, it is essential that new collective members are aware that these qualities are required. Much discussion was centred round the notion of self selection during an intensive training course. If the course is properly designed a trainee should at the end of the course be fully aware of the special requirements. However, it was considered that this topic should be extensively reviewed frequently. At the end of this long but very productive day women went off to have a meal and then all gathered for a celi followed by a party.

It is impossible to evaluate the benefits to be obtained from an exchange of this type. The demands on lesbian line workers are increasing all the time and different problems and difficulties are being presented constantly. As a lesbian line worker, it is easy to feel isolates oneself because of the unfamiliarity of situations which new callers may wish to talk about. From this point of view it is thoroughly inspiring to have

the opportunity to meet women from other parts of Ireland who may have more experience of particular situations. This means of exchange of ideas is a rewarding experience for the women involved in operating phone lines and therefore it is ultimately of enormous benefit to the callers and befriendees and contributes to the smooth running of the phone lines and the befriending services.

Such wide ranging cross border exchanges break down social barriers for everyone and provide the opportunity to make new friends, to build on our experiences and to help one another through new challenges.

Through the social events women have the opportunity to get to know each other a lot better, to get over excited and behave outrageously and to exchange addresses telephone numbers and the Goddess knows what else. Seriously - I think the social exchanges were fab but having written out everything as stated above I can only think of the usual mealie mouthed platitudes to come away with

Cheers

Lorraine

Dear CLL remember the Co-op North really like photos of events and please find enclosed the Women's News entry.

Hello there everybody. I am just back on my feet after another bout of flu which has held me up with this report.

Please note ~~that~~ this is a draft form and ~~that~~ not everybody from our line has read it. As soon as I get all ~~their~~ comments I will send final copy + Womens News info.

All the best with the report. I hope this arrives in time.

Lorraine

DLL.

Dear CLL remember the Co-op North really like photos of events and please find enclosed the Women'sNewsentry.

Lorraine telephone numbers of transsexual support groups and rape crisis to these services.

Cheers