



BLACK YOUTH HOTLINE

How aware are Black teenagers of the services available to them in the Toronto area? A survey conducted in the summer of 1980 among Black youth showed that the majority of those surveyed were not aware of existing health-care services and that those who *were* did not use those facilities.

The following summer the Health Promotion Directorate funded a project called Health Education for Immigrant Women. One aspect of that project was an experimental Black Youth Hotline, which the directorate hoped would be an alternative to the usual information/counselling and referral services offered to the community. The major goal of the hotline was to meet the needs of West Indian and Black youths and their parents — specifically, to address the issue of teenage sexuality and to en-

courage a dialogue between parent and child.

The Black Youth Hotline's telephone and answering service began operating out of the Immigrant Women's Centre on May 29, 1981. By the following September the group had logged an impressive number of calls, given the short time the service had been running. They had received 550 telephone calls, of which some 80 per cent required counselling and information. Of that number, 100 of the callers required in-depth counselling and another 35 were interested in volunteering their services to the hotline. Unfortunately, 80 calls were racially or sexually abusive.

The alternative service provided by the hotline proved to be a success from the outset, with parents as well as with teenagers. At a seminar held by the Organization of Parents of

Black Children (OPBC), parents were enthusiastic in their support and were clear that they wished to see the service expanded in scope as an ongoing operation.

Despite such interest, the future of the hotline is uncertain. Though volunteers have offered to work, funding is a major problem. The Immigrant Women's Centre has difficulty paying for the telephone line. Unless some source of money becomes available to hire one staff person — even on a part-time basis — to screen and co-ordinate volunteer activities, maintain the referral network, and keep statistics, the Black Youth Hotline is in danger of closing.

The Black Youth Hotline is located at 348 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1S4; its telephone number is 967-6104.