

COMMUNIQUE

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Commentary

Gay-Lesbian Phonline & MaineShare funding

by Dick Harrison, *New Sweden*

At the end of November, 1993, Northern Lambda Nord applied for inclusion in MaineShare, an alternative "United Way" umbrella group whose 21 member organizations work "for social equity, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and a non-violent world." This year they were giving "special attention" to a variety of applicant organizations, including those which address gay and lesbian issues on a statewide level in Maine. It is with this in mind that Lambda applied for funding for our singular statewide program, the Gay-Lesbian Phonline.

The Phonline funding request was targeted at expanding the awareness of people throughout Maine to the existence of this 12-year-old peer support, educational, and informational program. We requested money to pay for a white pages listing for the Phonline in every NYNEX book in the state, plus money to place display advertising in weekly newspapers throughout Maine. The Gay-Lesbian Phonline is already listed as a statewide resource in many of the travel and

informational guides published by and for lesbians and gaymen.

In her letter detailing the reasons why MaineShare would not fund the Phonline, membership committee chair Jeanne Davis expressed two concerns: (1) the proposal "for an expanded phonline [did not meet] the criteria we have established", i.e. having "a demonstrably statewide program," and (2) "our member groups focus on advocacy and education rather than direct service (in contrast to the United Way) and while we recognize that NLN has undertaken activities that fall within those categories, the phonline project in itself does not seem to."

At the February 13th NLN Steering Committee meeting in Caribou, we discussed the application and MaineShare's response. Ms. Davis pointed out in her letter that "the mission/statement of purpose as written on your application indicates a focus on Northern Maine and New Brunswick" rather than statewide. When we reviewed our application, that was indeed what our mission states. NLN

provides activities and programs for this region. But the application also says, in the section entitled "geographic area", that "the Gay-Lesbian Phonline, for which MaineShare funding would be used, serves anyone who has access to a telephone or a TTD; the focus area of the Phonline services is the entire State of Maine." Despite the fact that when I was called and asked several questions about our application and pointed out that the Phonline has been the only one of its kind in the state for 12 years and receives calls from throughout Maine, it seems that MaineShare does not consider that a statewide program. The NLN Steering Committee decided that perhaps our mission statement needs to be amended to include a statement specifically addressing the Phonline, noting that it is a statewide component of Northern Lambda Nord. We'll discuss that at the March 13th meeting.

Let me address the issue of "advocacy and education" which MaineShare feels that the Phonline does not undertake. The Phonline itself does not advocate for anything or educate anyone. It is only when someone

calls and can speak with an out gayman or lesbian can advocacy and education take place. MaineShare says they fund organizations which "encourage self-help and community empowerment." Then let's think about the fearful, closeted, self-oppressed gay person who heard someone at work talk about the "fag phone" that they saw listed in the phonebook. After looking for themselves and trying several times to call, only to hang up repeatedly when someone answers, this person finally has the courage to talk with a proud and unashamed lesbian or gayman on the other end of the line. This peer support which Phonline volunteers provide can lead to the lifting of the negative feelings with which the caller is burdened, and thus help to make her or him feel better about being queer in a homophobic society. Is not this process which takes place when someone calls the Phonline "encouraging self-help and community empowerment?" Doesn't a supportive response from the Phonline help people do what the NLN mission statement says - and applies to the Phonline as well - "to help members of this community to divest themselves of negative,

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CP/POB 990 Caribou, Maine 04736-0990 USA Gay-Lesbian Phonline/Télégal 207.498-2088 (TDD/Voice-Voix)

homophobic and self-oppressive attitudes?" Is this a prime example of the self-help and empowerment which MaineShare helps foster?

It seems that there's a type of "catch-22" in order for us to receive MaineShare funding. They want us to be a "demonstrably statewide program", but in order to be known statewide, we need funding to get the word out, but we can't get funding because they say we're not statewide.

The Phoneline is based in Caribou and is only listed in the Aroostook County phonebooks. The calls we receive from other parts of Maine are from callers who are most likely already in touch with the organized lesbian-gay community in

the state. They found the number in one of the gay and lesbian travel guides which list the Phoneline as a statewide resource. Or they read one of the Maine lesbian and gay monthly publications. So this means we're only reaching the out and not-too-closeted gay people. But how do we reach a closeted gayman or lesbian, or a parent or friend, or anyone who may want to call for peer support, education, and information? They won't know it's there unless they have an Aroostook phonebook. But here's an idea. Perhaps we can get listed in all the books throughout the state, then more people will know about us. Now where can we get the financial help to do that?



Gay/Lesbian G·U·I·D·E Lesbienne/Gai

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NORTHERN LAMBDA NORD (NLN), CP/POB 990, Caribou, Maine 04736 USA

GAY-LESBIAN PHONELINE 207.498-2088 TDD/Voice - staffed Wed, 7-9pm (Maine), 8-10pm (N.B.)

AROOSTOOK AREA GAY/LESBIAN AA GROUP meets Sundays, 7pm (Maine time) in Madawaska. Groupe bilingue/bilingual group. Call 207.498-2088 to make contact

▼
ACT UP/BANGOR POB 1554, 04402-1554, 207.947-3947

AIDS New Brunswick 800.561-4009
AIDSLine/Maine 800.851-AIDS - Mon-Sat 9am-5pm, Mon & Wed till 7:30pm
AM CHOFSI Maine Jewish group, meets monthly, POB 5017, Portland 04101, 207.874-2970 (Rheatha)

APEX: A Point of Departure, published monthly by Phoenix Press, POB 4743, Portland 04112

COMMUNITY PRIDE REPORTER: The newspaper for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community of Maine, published monthly, 142 High St, Suite 634, Portland 04101, 207.879-1342

DIAL KIDS, 774-TALK for lesbian, gay, bisexual & unsure youth under 19
DIGNITY/MAINE Catholic group, POB 8113, Portland 04104

EASTERN MAINE AIDS NETWORK POB 2038, Bangor 04401-2038, 207.990-EMAN

FREDERICTON LESBIANS & GAYS (FLAG) POB 1556, Station A E3B 5G2, 506.457-2156 (Mon & Thurs 6-9pm)

FRUITS OF OUR LABORS Lesbian-Gay-Bi events calendar published monthly, POB 125, Belfast ME 04915

GAZETTE For Lesbians & Gay Men in Atlantic Canada, published 10 times yearly, POB 34090, Scotia Square, Halifax, NS B3J 3S1

GAIS & LESBIENNES DE MONCTON/ GAYS & LESBIANS OF MONCTON (GLM) CP/POB 1072, Riverview E1B 1V0, 506.855-8064

GAIS/ES NOR GAYS (GNG) CP/POB 983, Bathurst E2A 4H8

GAY/LESBIAN ALLIANCE University of Southern Maine, 88 Winslow Street, Portland 04103, 207.874-6596

GAY/LESBIAN COMMUNITY NETWORK POB 212, Bangor 04401, 207.862-5907/941-2189

GAY/LESBIAN/BISEXUAL PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP Portland, 207.772-4741 (Frank)

HARBOR MASTERS, INC. leather-levi group, POB 4044, Portland 04104

INTEGRITY Episcopalian group, St. Matthew's Church, 18 Union Street, Hallowell 04347, 207.622-6631

LESBIAN/GAY COMMITTEE, MAINE CHAPTER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS POB 5112, Station A, Portland 04102

MAINE BISEXUAL PEOPLE'S NETWORK POB 10818, Portland 04104

MAINE LESBIAN & GAY LAW ASSOCIATION (LeGal) POB 443, Portland 04112, 207.829-3379

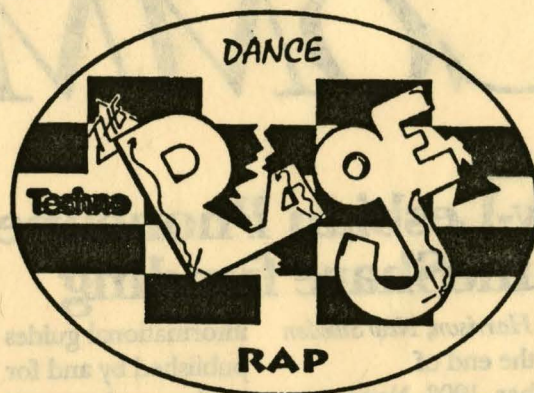
MAINE LESBIAN-GAY POLITICAL ALLIANCE POB 232, Hallowell 04347
NEW BRUNSWICK COALITION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS REFORM/LA COALITION POUR LA RÉFORME DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK POB/CP

1556, Station/Succursale A, Fredericton E3B 5G2 506.457-2156

NO BORDERS/SANS FRONTIÈRES POB/CP 461, Campbellton, NB E3N 3G4

OUTRIGHT: Portland Alliance of Gay & Lesbian Youth, age 22 and under, POB 5028, Station A, Portland 04102, 800.339-4042

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