

# GOOD PRESS

## Boarding School Abuse Helpline gets 10,000 Calls

by Barry Hugill - Education Correspondent

MORE than 10,000 boarding school children contacted an experimental helpline set up to combat sexual abuse, *The Observer* has learned.

Callers complained of abuse, bullying and of the worry and distress at being away from home. They were counselled by experienced professionals from ChildLine - the agency set up to deal with young victims of sexual abuse.

The schools are sensitive to the charge that while often academically outstanding they are no substitute for family life.

To counter the popular image of icy dormitories, iron bedsteads, long runs, cold baths and sadistic fagging, the schools are promoting next month's National Boarding Week. Hundreds of schools will open their doors to any parents wishing to inspect what they have to offer.

But a group of psychotherapists specialising in work with ex-boarders has denounced the week as a public relations gimmick.

Piers Partridge, himself public school educated, runs five therapy groups in London. He has 50 clients who, he

claims, have been traumatised by the experience of being sent away from home at a young age.

"Outwardly the schools have changed. Many are now co-ed, the rooms are warmer. But it is not the physical conditions that lead to trauma. It is the sudden and total separation from home that is damaging", he said.

"The main problem is that schools don't have the trained pastoral staff. Because someone is a good teacher doesn't mean that they can give real parental care. Housemasters are not trained to deal with bullying and sexual abuse", he added.

Mr Partridge and his colleagues at the Spectrum Therapy Centre in north London are organising an alternative to National Boarding Week. At the end of October they plan to bring together boarders to discuss the psychological aftermath of childhoods spent away from home.

They will consider a campaign to make it compulsory for schools to train housemasters.

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