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Connecting the disconnected: Telephones, activism, and "faring well" in Britain, 1950-2000.[1]

Introduction

This chapter examines how telephone technology was embraced by innovative, radical groups from the 1950s as a means of meeting welfare needs that were overlooked or deemed problematic by mainstream services. Despite the ready availability in the 2010s and 2020s of access to websites, telephone hotlines and apps that can put people in touch with an enormous range of services, historians of welfare have only recently begun to turn their attention to the emergence of the telephone as a tool to support citizens "faring well" in the UK and elsewhere.[2] Eve Colpus's chapter in

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[2] McKinney, Cait. 2020. *Information Activism. A Queer History of Lesbian Media Technologies*. Durham NC: Duke University Press; Zeavin, Hannah. 2021. *The Distance Cure: A History of Teletherapy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

this volume is an important and timely examination of how children and young people interacted with hotlines designed and provided by adults.[3] This chapter makes a significant contribution to our understanding of telephone technology being used in welfare contexts by tracing its roots as a tool used by experiential experts to help others in their community of experience, and the wider adoption of this by mainstream services. For the radical groups, telephones were a means of enabling people to access support and information and thereby to increase the chances of their "faring well" with a hostile state, as was the case with Defence and Release. Experiential expertise designed services that were accessible when and how people needed them, with support provided by people from that community of experience or trusted professionals. Some of the work was political, with evidence generated by Release, for example, used to challenge police practice and lobby for legal reform.

Although the people whose work is explored in this chapter did not use the term "faring well", the concept was central to their activity. Faring originally meant to travel or journey, as well as good or bad fortunes one experienced in life.[4] For some of the people in this chapter, their journeys involved a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, before making a life in post-war London. For others, having the resources to deal with the vagaries of life was by no means a given. Some of the initiatives in this chapter provided welfare services, but they were arguably more "faring well" services. The experiential experts in this context take various forms. As will be seen, the Reverend (Revd) Chad Varah moved beyond his calling as a priest to develop, through

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[3] See Chapter 8 in this collection.
[4] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. fare, v.¹, July 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8491176010. Accessed 4 November 2023.

experience and experiment, expertise in supporting those in crisis. Frank Crichlow and Michael X used their experiences of harassment and arrest by the police to support others in the same situation. Caroline Coon actively built her expertise in the law by learning what she needed to help a friend appeal a prison sentence, and then through her work with Release. These experiential experts also sought out professional experts who respected experience when they needed to, such as lawyers who were interested in improving access to justice. To make their services available, these experiential experts used a technology that was a readily accessible element of their lives and their wider communities of experience, the telephone.

Anthropologists and historians of consumption have understood the home telephone as being a middle-class technology, rather than a working-class one. Douglas and Isherwood explored the take-up of different technologies in homes by different classes over the twentieth century. Whilst most homes had at least one television set by the 1960s, domestic telephone lines did not reach such levels of market saturation before the 1980s.[5] This does not mean, however, that telephones had no place in working-class communities in the post-war period: on the contrary, there was a vast network of public telephone boxes. Access to a private telephone reflected the inequalities in post-war Britain, but the telephone network offered great potential for use in ensuring people could "fare well" in life.

The history of the telephone

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[5] Douglas, Mary and Isherwood, Baron. 1996. *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. London: Routledge.

Public call offices, as they were first known, emerged from the 1880s, as businesses allowed people to use their phones to make calls for a small fee. As Linge and Sutton note, these offices were in areas with high footfall, such as train stations or shops. To ensure privacy, telephone equipment was housed within cabinets or cubicles that the caller stepped into, which later developed into the phone box or kiosk. With the consolidation of telephone services under the General Post Office (GPO) in the early twentieth century, phone boxes spread across the country. 20,000 kiosks were installed by 1935. At their peak in the 1990s, 132,000 kiosks run by British Telecom were in use.[6] Although ownership of a domestic telephone line was strongly associated with greater affluence, market research undertaken by the GPO in the early 1970s showed that the growth in new, first-time installations was amongst younger urban dwellers, of all social backgrounds.[7] The domestic landline and the phone box were effectively supplanted by mobile phones, and then by smart phones, both of which arguably combined the best of both worlds: ready access to a phone line without having to negotiate with other people, and not being tied to one place. The role and importance of the telephone was not unconnected to other forms of mobility. As Simon Gunn notes, public transport experienced a crisis in the 1960s, with major reductions in both bus and rail services. This had a significant impact on those living in rural areas, or the outer suburbs. Yet those who lived in the more central areas of towns and cities could still face poor public transport or obstacles caused by road, rail and canals. Not everyone could afford a car

[6] Linge, Nigel and Sutton, Andy. 2017. *The British Telephone Box*. Stroud: Amberley, 7-10, 71.
[7] Our Telephone Customers. A Report on the Residential Research Sample, Post Office Central Headquarters, Statistics and Business Research Department. Marketing Research Information System. Residential Research Sample. Current supply April 1972 – March 1973. Report 3/74, 3. TCC 249/26, British Telecom (BT) Archives, London.

or a car for more than one member of the household.[8] In this context, though someone might need to leave their home to find the nearest phone box, making a telephone call was still going to be easier, quicker and cheaper than trying to get into town and enabled people to engage with a community of experience wherever they were.

From the 1880s, public phone boxes could be used to contact the operator to summon help from the local fire brigade, whilst the police in major towns and cities had a network of police boxes for this purpose. In this way, the telephone was being used to connect people to essential public services, at this very local or municipal level. Likewise, telephone arrangements for contacting the fire brigade were determined at a local level. 999 was introduced in 1937 as a nationwide number for emergency calls that was memorable, and which could be dialled easily on a rotary phone in poor lighting.[9] As much as this was a step to try to prevent future tragedy, it was also part of rethinking and re-organising local government in the 1920s and 1930s, which included the restructuring of the emergency services, as Shane Ewen has shown.[10] On the other hand, as Eloise Moss demonstrates, 999 also offered middle- and upper-class householders in London who had domestic telephones the ability to summon help far faster than their working-class households, who would still have had to run to find a patrolling police officer, police call box or phone box.[11]

Experimenting with the telephone

[8] Gunn, Simon. 2021. Spatial mobility in later twentieth-century Britain, *Contemporary British History* 36: 9-13.

[9] Linge and Sutton. *Telephone Box*, 58-70.

[10] Ewen, Shane. 2023. Central Government and the Modernization of the British Fire Service, 1900-38, *Twentieth Century British History* 14: 317-338.

[11] Moss, Eloise. 2018. "Dial 999 for Help!" The Three-Digit Emergency Number and the Transnational Politics of Welfare Activism, 1937–1979, *Journal of Social History* 52: 468-500.

A major gap in welfare provision was obtaining help whilst experiencing a mental health crisis, as the Revd. Chad Varah found in 1953. Varah was an East London clergyman, and, from the 1930s, he went beyond his vocational training by building up experience with counselling people on sexual problems through the Parish Youth Club. Much of this involved advising young people who were planning to marry on sexual matters, but he was deeply affected by a girl who took her own life. In Varah's account, the girl was upset, confused and ashamed by starting her period, and she did not know what was happening to her. Dealing with the powerful shame and stigma that could accompany sex led to Varah moving over time into suicide prevention. By the early 1950s, Varah was contemplating the rise in suicides in London, and wondering what could be done to help people in crisis, when they needed help. Varah was inspired by the notice fixed on his phone giving the 999 number for emergencies

> What was needed was a sort of 999 for potential suicides, an easily remembered number despairing people could ring at any hour of the day or night. No life-saving service could be part-time to be really effective. One of the weaknesses of the Welfare State was the paucity of people giving other than medical help outside office hours.[12]

Varah's telephone initiative became known as the Samaritans, offering those in crisis an opportunity to talk anonymously, without fear of judgement.

The earliest Samaritans group was run by Varah and a group of volunteers. He offered very little detail about their experiences and motivations, but described two groups: the professionals, who "could be held in reserve", and "ordinary" people. The "ordinary" people volunteered to help Varah with running the new phone line, and

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[12] Varah, Chad. 1985. *The Samaritans: Befriending the Suicidal*. London: Constable, 17-19.

initially kept callers company whilst waiting to speak to him. However, Varah realised

that the volunteers brought something valuable: listening without judgment to the

callers. This led to the calling being done entirely by volunteers in 1954. With his

secretary Vivian Prosser and a growing team, Varah had a selection process that was

initially subjective, based on whether Varah felt that he could tell the potential volunteer

that he had done something awful. Actively listening to callers developed into formal

practice and training, supported by weekly briefings and training, and one of the core

feature of Samaritans groups as they were established elsewhere. By 1963, there were

14 Samaritans groups in the UK, all of whom had, like Varah's original group, a

specially selected number to call.[13]

Another personal crisis that did not fit into office hours was being arrested by the

police. As police forces were established and grew during the nineteenth century,

becoming the main prosecutors of crimes, so did a need for standardisation of their

practices. As Charles Wegg-Prosser shows, from the 1880s judges expressed their

concern about inconsistencies with how people were treated following arrest. In 1906,

the Lord Chief Justice wrote to the Chief Constable of Birmingham police further raising

how this was jeopardising fair trials, which led in 1912 to the publication of first set of the

Judges' Rules. Police forces were not legally bound by the Rules, but the expectations

were clear.[14] The Rules underwent various amendments over time, and getting a final

overhaul in 1964, along with seven administrative procedures. Procedure 7 explicitly

stated that

> a person in custody should be allowed to speak on the telephone to his [*sic*]
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> solicitor or to his friends provided that no hindrance is likely to be caused to the
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> processes of investigation, or the administration of justice by his doing so.[15]

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[13] ibid. 24-28.

[14] Wegg-Prosser, Charles. 1973. *The Police and the Law*. London: Oyez, 91.

[15] St. Johnston, T.E. 1966. Judges' Rules and Police Interrogation in England Today. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 57: 91.

Whilst making a telephone call was not yet a right of the arrested person, the procedure allowed for it. It offered an opportunity to push back against the force of the police, by allowing the individual to obtain their own legal advice and support, rather than being pushed into a decision that was not in their best interests by the police. This ability to summon help following arrest would prove to be important for the development of telephone hotlines in the 1960s, as a means of mitigating the impact of aggressive policing first of the African Caribbean community and second of the counterculture.

Experience: The African Caribbean community and the police in West London

The African Caribbean community in West London grew from the 1940s, following calls for workers to help rebuild Britain after the Second World War. As James Mills notes, police forces in port cities like London had long monitored Lascar seamen, mainly from India, who used cannabis. Cannabis consumption at this point was effectively confined to the seamen and their close associates. With Black people largely excluded from pubs and clubs in London, a vibrant café culture grew up in Notting Hill. The Metropolitan Police observed the growing cannabis market in the clubs in this area from the 1950s, and by the early 1960s were aware of young white "Beatniks" beginning to frequent the clubs.[16] One popular café was El Rio, established by Frank Crichlow. Born in Trinidad in 1932, Crichlow travelled to Britain in 1953. He initially worked on the railways, then as a musician, setting up El Rio in 1959.[17]

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[16] Mills, James H. 2012. *Cannabis Nation: Control and Consumption in Britain, 1928-2008.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 117.

[17] Phillips, Mike. 2014. Crichlow, Frank Gilbert (1932–2010), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

El Rio was a project to bring people from the different Caribbean islands together following the 1958 Notting Hill race riots, and it was open 24 hours a day.[18] Crichlow ran a gambling club in the café basement that did not comply with the 1956 Gambling Act: but, unlike other illicit gambling club owners in the area, he refused to give bribes to the local police to overlook it.[19] This marked Crichlow and his café out for significant police harassment, which would continue with his next venture, the Mangrove Restaurant.[20] These experiences led to Crichlow's personal activism, which included launching the Notting Hill Carnival and the Mangrove Community Association, but also to him using both venues as resources for the community of experience.[21] Both cafés were places where people could find legal advice, with the Mangrove having a Black barrister on hand for people to speak to as well as to go to the local police stations.[22] Before that, however, El Rio offered people the opportunity to connect with those who could help them "fare well" with the police and the state, as well as to get initiatives off the ground.

The Racial Action Adjustment Society (RAAS) was founded in February 1965 by Michael X, Roy Sawh, Jan Carew and Abdullah Patel as a grassroots activist association open only to Black people.[23] Michael X was born Michael de Freitas in Trinidad in 1933, and settled in London in the late 1950s, where he became an enforcer for Perec Rachman, the infamous slum landlord.[24] De Freitas was arrested during the Notting Hill riots of August 1958, and this experience drew him into activism.[25] Whilst sitting in a barber's shop in early 1965, de Freitas heard others talking about Malcolm X

[18] Gould, Tony. 1993. *Inside Outsider: the Life and Times of Colin MacInnes.* London: Allison and Busby, 194.
[19] Howe, Darcus. 2020. *From Bobby to Babylon: Blacks and the British Police.* London: Bookmarks, 50.
[20] See also Chapter 14 in this collection.
[21] Phillips. Crichlow.
[22] Howe. *From Bobby*, 51.
[23] Humphry, Derek and Tindall, David. 1977. *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X.* London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 45-46, 51.
[24] See Abdul Malik, Michael. 1968. *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X.* London: Andre Deutsch; Williams, John L. 2008. *Michael X: A Life in Black and White.* London: Century.
[25] Malik. *From Michael*, 73-76.

and the Black Power movement in the US.[26] This piqued de Freitas's interest, and he read as much as he could about Malcolm X before accompanying him on his visit to the UK in February that year. De Freitas converted to Islam, assuming the name Michael Abdul Malik, though he also used Michael X.[27] Michael X and therefore RAAS had a high media profile from the outset. However, despite Michael X's claims of having 60,000 members, they barely had more than two hundred during the five years that they were active.[28] RAAS did, however, create an environment for a step change in the use of telephone hotlines to enable people to fare better in engagements with the police.

The white writer Colin MacInnes moved to the area in the 1940s and became a regular at El Rio.[29] MacInnes made himself useful by being someone who could be called upon to go and help anyone who had been arrested, at any time of day or night. Whilst not a lawyer, he would advise people as best he could and try to obtain bail for them.[30] MacInnes had experience of the police, having been arrested in a gambling club in East London in 1955 and charged with drugs offences, though he was later acquitted.[31] In November 1966, the African Caribbean community raised funds to support a man who was on trial for living on immoral earnings.[32] His supporters contacted RAAS, and this, in addition to awareness of MacInnes' activity around the cafés as a sort of emergency legal aid service, led to the formation of Defence.[33] Crichlow hosted a meeting at El Rio, at which Defence and its initial committee was established. This included Michael X as the treasurer, Courtney Tulloch as the field worker, and MacInnes as press officer.[34] Defence had an office and a telephone line

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[26] ibid. 131.
[27] Sharp, James. 1981. *The Life and Death of Michael X*. Waterford: Uni Books, 23.
[28] Humphry and Tindall. *False Messiah*, 49-50.
[29] Phillips. Crichlow.
[30] Malik. *From Michael*, 163.
[31] De-la-Noy, Michael. 2004. MacInnes, Colin (1914–1976). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[32] MacInnes, Colin, 1967. RAAStus: WI in W2, *Oz*, February, 14-17.
[33] ibid. 15.
[34] Humphry and Tindall. *False Messiah*, 53-54.

available 24 hours a day.[35] Tulloch did most of the work, answering the phone, arranging lawyers and sorting out bail sureties.[36] Born in Jamaica, Tulloch moved to Britain to join his parents in the late 1950s in Nottingham. Here, Tulloch befriended Ray Gosling, then a detached youth worker, who encouraged Tulloch to explore writing and activism, which Tulloch did first in Brighton and then in Notting Hill.[37] The service was publicised through notices with the Defence phone number posted on message boards in cafés in the area.[38] With Defence, Tulloch too was drawing upon his own experience and building up expertise as he went along.

Experience: Release

Defence lasted seven months. There were tensions within the group around Michael X's engagement with the national press and this, along with Michael's arrest under the Race Relations Act (1965) following a speech he gave in Reading, effectively terminated the project.[39] However, before his arrest, Michael had become aware of another group attracting the attention of the police over drug consumption, the counterculture. Michael X thought that the counterculture needed to adopt the same strategies as the African Caribbean community in organising a legal aid service like Defence. This idea was taken up by Caroline Coon and Rufus Harris, who launched Release, with its distinctive bust card, at the Legalise Pot Rally in Hyde Park in the summer of 1967. Coon was studying for a fine art degree when a Black friend was arrested and then imprisoned for possession of marijuana, and she was horrified by the

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[35] MacInnes. RAAStus, 15.
[36] Tulloch, Courtney. 1972. The Reading Collective, *Race Today*, 4: 95-97, 95.
[37] Phillips, Mike. 2006. Obituary: Courtney Tulloch. *The Guardian*. December 13. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/dec/13/guardianobituaries.obituaries1. Accessed 7 September 2023.
[38] Malik. *From Michael*, 165.
[39] Tulloch. Reading Collective, 97.

way he was treated. To try to help her friend, Coon learned the law as she went along and she tried to get an appeal launched for him. Coon knew that a 24-hour telephone line was possible, because of the Samaritans: Varah was one of her heroes.[40]

Release tackled the increasing problem of young people being arrested by the police, either following stops on the street or raids of their homes or nightclub queues, through the bust card. The bust card – a small piece of card, easily tucked into a pocket or a wallet – gave concise advice on one's rights on arrest and exhorted the arrestee to phone Release for help, using the provision under the Judges' Rules. Release would then provide suitable legal assistance and advice as soon as possible. They actively sought out lawyers willing to "act radically and change the social and legal *status quo*" around young people experiencing police corruption, but needed other forms of expertise, and built up a roster of professionals who they could call upon.[41]

The telephone hotline brought people into contact with Release when they were in crisis. It helped them get the aid they needed at the police station, but it was also a means of helping people to "fare well" in other ways. Coon was clear that it was essential to see the person in need as a person worthy of respect and support. This started with the police treating them fairly, but also meant ensuring that the person's needs were met in the round. Enabling someone to "fare well" could include helping them with arranging housing or benefits, getting them medical attention and arranging psychological support.[42] It also, in the longer term, required using the evidence built up from Release's work to try to effect change within the system. Coon and Harris published *The Release Report on Drug Offenders and the Law* in 1969, reflecting Release's role as a support and a lobbying organisation.[43]

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[40] Coon, Caroline. 2004. We were the welfare branch of the alternative society. In *The Unsung Sixties: Memoirs of Social Innovation*, ed. Helene Curtis and Mimi Sanderson, 186. London: Whiting and Birch.
[41] Coon. Welfare branch, 185-86
[42] ibid. 188.
[43] Coon, Caroline and Harris, Rufus. 1969.*The Release Report on Drug Offenders and the Law.* London: Sphere.

Writing in 1976, the radical Anglican priest, the Revd Kenneth Leech recognised the role of countercultural groups in providing community resources in the form of switchboards and free drop-in centres. Leech wrote the "young people in the Underground became very welfare-conscious, but the new groups which were beginning to emerge were used and trusted more than the well-established 'straight' social work bodies".[44] Leech's observation suggested that young people felt more comfortable using these services, certainly as the experts whose support they sought were either of the counterculture themselves or access to them was brokered by people from their community of experience. "Faring well" in this context, then, involved feeling that one was valued and respected by those with the knowledge and ability to help.

Experience: the wider counterculture

The idea of connecting people at any time of day or night with the information they needed was central to the foundation of BIT, which emerged from the same countercultural networks in West London as Defence and Release.[45] BIT was launched by the *International Times* (*IT*) underground newspaper in 1968, funded in part by a grant made by the Gulbenkian Foundation. BIT offered advice and information on any topic the caller wished to know more about, and this could be obtained either by calling the BIT offices or dropping in at any time of day or night.[46] BIT offered a means of dealing with all the demands for information about the counterculture that came the paper's way.[47] BIT was run from a house in Notting Hill, where the telephone line was

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[44] Leech, Kenneth. 1976. *Youthquake. Spirituality and the Growth of a Counter-Culture.* London: Sphere, 101.

[45] BIT Information service was an important part of the radical alternative movement in Britain between 1968 and 1979.

[46] Nelson, Elizabeth. 1989. *British Counter-Culture 1966-1973, A Study of the Underground Press.* London: Macmillan, 77-78.

[47] Beam, Alan. 1976. *Rehearsal for the Year 2000 (Drugs, religions, madness, crime, communes, love, visions, festivals and lunar energy). The Rebirth of Albion Free State (Known in the Dark Ages as England). Memoirs of a Male Midwife (1966-1976).* London: Revelaction Press, 34.

staffed by a combination of paid and voluntary workers from the counterculture on a 24-hour basis, alongside a drop-in information and advice service. Visitors could use free photocopying services, or to help themselves to free food and clothing. BIT was popular. In 1973, they received an average of one thousand phone calls a week, along with three hundred visits, and around ninety letters a week.[48]

Nicholas Albery saw an advert for BIT, and he volunteered to do the night shift in 1968, when BIT was a few months old. Albery was the son of Sir Donald Albery, a theatre producer, and studied for a time at Oxford University, where he came across the counterculture and began using drugs. Albery experienced surveillance by his college and the police, before dropping out of university. He travelled to San Francisco to explore the counterculture, seeing at first-hand how others were experimenting with sharing information and supporting an alternative way of living. Returning to London, Albery looked for opportunities to build the counterculture there, and to share what he had learned.[49] Albery worked at BIT for six years, recording his experiences in a book published under the name of "Alan Beam". Through Albery's memoirs, we gain a sense of the diverse range of things that BIT did, though his first task was familiarising himself with BIT's library of information on the counterculture.[50] Whilst being an information portal – "an analogue precursor to Google", as Joe Boyd, record producer and collaborator of Hoppy's, put it – remained central to the work of BIT, they diversified into other means of trying to engage with the needs of the community.[51]

One need that emerged strongly was offering young people a place to stay. Albery recounted people "crashing" overnight at the BIT house, during his night shifts,

[48] See Arundale, M. 1990. Budget rent-a-country, *The Guardian,* March 30; Atton, Chris. 1999. The infoshop: the alternative information centre of the 1990s, *New Library World,* 100: 24-29; Shipley, Peter. 1976. *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain*. London: Bodley Head, 206, 242.
[49] Beam. *Rehearsal*, 1-22; Schwarz, Walter. 2001. Obituary: Nicholas Albery, *The Guardian*, 8 June. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/jun/08/guardianobituaries.books. Accessed 7 September 2023.
[50] Beam. *Rehearsal*, 34.
[51] Boyd, Joe. 2019. Hopkins John Victor Lindsay [Hoppy] (1937-2015). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

who would have to leave before the day shift workers arrived.[52] Albery also prepared a

booklet entitled *Project London Free* for *IT*. This was to be a London version of Abbie

Hoffman's *Fuck the System* guide to New York, highlighting how one could get by in the

city without spending any money. Albery asked homeless BIT users where one could

find free accommodation, food and clothing, using their expertise through experience in

order to help others "fare well" if homeless. *Project London Free* contained many tips.

These included how one could sleep on the third floor of the BBC's Bush House in an

area with camp beds for the night newscasters and telephone operators, alongside a

comprehensive list of welfare services in London. Some were part of the counterculture,

such as Release, or adjacent to it – such as Kenneth Leech, or the New Horizon Youth

Centre – others were mainstream, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux and the

Catholic Housing Aid Society.[53]

A different example of this came through Albery and BIT's later work with the

Ruff Tuff Kreem Puff Estate Agency, which collated lists of squats and buildings suitable

for use as squats.[54] Albery was instrumental in developing BIT from a switchboard into

an infoshop, and continued after BIT to be a social innovator, including establishing the

Institute for Social Innovations in 1985.[55] Growing as a movement from the 1970s,

infoshops are communities of experience built around alternative or underground

presses, offering shops where people could browse or buy their publications, alongside

community-run events or services.[56] BIT closed in 1979, when it could no longer

financially sustain its activities.[57] Release and BIT were examples of experiential

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[52] Beam, *Rehearsal*, 43.
[53] Anon. 1969. *Project London Free*. London: Revelaction.
[54] Beam. *Rehearsal*, 153-55.
[55] Albery, Nicholas. 1996. The Institute for Social Inventions, London, in *New Thinking for a New Millennium*, ed. Richard A. Slaughter. London: Routledge.
[56] Examples at the time of publication include 56A Infoshop in South London https://56a.org.uk/ and the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh https://autonomous.org.uk/info/info-shop/. Accessed 7 September 2023.
[57] BIT information service, Fellowship for Intentional Community, https://web.archive.org/web/20161120121455/https://www.ic.org/wiki/bit-information-service/. Accessed 7 September 2023.

expertise being valued, and made accessible in different ways, through a telephone call, but also through creating community spaces for people to use.

Similar ventures followed. Richard Branson set up the Student Advisory Centre in London in 1968, after he and his then girlfriend struggled to find reliable information to support them with an unwanted pregnancy, again using the model of sharing experiential expertise within the community. The Advisory Centre used a telephone to connect students with guidance on issues that affected them but which were not always easy to get help with, from housing to sexual health.[58] In summer 1970, ADVISE: Immigrant Advice Centre opened in Islington, offering 24-hour access over the telephone to legal advice provided by Black lawyers and social workers.[59] Another service, Gentle Ghost, was set up as a film company to record the Bath Rock Festival of 1970, but they diversified to provide an alternative employment agency for finding musicians and artists through to building workers, providing a removal and storage service, running evening classes on such topics as yoga or electrics, and running an advice service. Although Gentle Ghost had a house that they used as a base for their activities, they also ran a telephone line for people to call in for advice six days a week. Gentle Ghost took a fifteen percent cut from funds raised by the employment agency to pay for people to staff the telephone line and to run the advice service. They also made use of *Time Out*, the London listings magazine, to advertise their services – and, in some cases, to reach people beyond the counterculture.[60]

Mainstreaming the marginal?

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[58] Branson, Richard. 1998. *Losing my Virginity: The Autobiography*. London: Virgin, 68-70.
[59] Blackhearted, Atticus. 1970. *Sunday Telegraph*. July 5. London Council of Social Services Legal Advice Services. ACC/1888/250/010, London Metropolitan Archives, London.
[60] Hearn, Jackie. 1972. The Gentle Ghost, *Kensington Post*, April 7, 14; Phillips, Barty. 1974. Welcome ghosts, *The Guardian*, June 16, 27; Neustatter, Angela. 1974. Like it or lump it, *The Guardian*, November 18, 9.

The potential of telephone lines also appealed to organisations that were not part of the counterculture in West London. Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB) were founded in 1939 to offer free information and advice to the public. This followed the recommendations of the Betterton Report on Public Assistance in 1924, though its eventual implementation was fuelled by planning for another war. Until the 1970s, the CAB were run under the auspices of the National Council of Social Services, with a national umbrella group, the National Citizens' Advice Bureaux Council (NCABC) subsequently NCAB, offering a network for all the local branches. Individual CAB were run by a combination of paid staff and volunteers. Each individual CAB was technically a charity, and so the way in which they organised their services on the ground varied, reflecting the needs of their local welfare mix. All staff and volunteers were, however, trained to the same standards, and all had access to the CAB national information base.[61] As Oliver Blaiklock notes, CAB volunteers tended in the 1950s and 1960s to be retired professional people, or women who had worked before marriage as social workers, nurses or teachers. There were also demands for the CAB to actively recruit younger volunteers to help meet the needs of young people.[62] NCAB held an annual conference, which was an opportunity for issues and ideas to emerge from the grassroots as a means of identifying potential gaps or holes in provision. By the late 1960s, suggestions that CAB offer their own 24-hour hotlines or switchboards were being made at the conference. Following the development of Release, the Student Advisory Centre and BIT, this theme was raised at the conference of 1967-68. However, the idea was rejected: the NCAB felt that there was no need for people to have advice in the middle of the night, and pointed to the wealth of information that could be consulted during working hours in the branch, when the advisors and callers had access

[61] National Citizens Advice Bureaux Council (NCABC). 1968. *Report of National Citizens Advice Bureaux Council to National Standing Conference of CABX, 1966-68*. London: NCABC Council, preliminary page and 3.
[62] Blaiklock, Oliver. 2012. Advising the Citizen: Citizens Advice Bureaux, voluntarism and the welfare state in England, 1938-1965. Unpublished PhD Thesis. King's College London, 226.

to the library each CAB had. [63] The NCAB were right to point to the benefits of a visit to the branch, with the dedicated time to deal with the problem and the ability to give the advice seeker literature to take away. However, this did not adequately deal with the issue of someone needing advice but being unable to get there during standard working hours or needing help in an emergency. The NCAB assumed that they knew what was best.

These issues about where advice could be found and the best way of organising it would occupy the advice movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was a major impulse between the creation of the neighbourhood law centre movement. The first neighbourhood law centre in Notting Hill was a practical response to dealing with the issue of "legal deserts", or typically working-class areas of towns and cities either having no law firms located there or those that did not having the expertise in housing, family law, etc. that were needed by the community. [64] In 1979 the Royal Commission on Legal Services reported on the need to rationalise advice provision – legal or otherwise. This was to be done through government support of centralised CAB in each major area. It was soon evident that people's information and support needs were not best met through such a structure. [65] Telephones continued to offer another way of squaring this circle. In the early 1970s, the government was chairing discussions with consumer groups and local authorities to explore the possibilities afforded by mobile advice units for rural communities, along with telephone hotlines, as part of a common, national advice framework run by the CAB and local government. [66] This national advice framework did not come to fruition. If it had, the techniques and tools of the experiential experts would have been taken up by professionals and trained volunteers.

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[63] NCABC. *Report*, 10-11.
[64] Byles, Anthea and Morris, Pauline. 1977. *Unmet Need - the Case of the Neighbourhood Law Centre*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
[65] Bradley, Kate. 2019. *Lawyers for the Poor: Legal Advice, Voluntary Action and Citizenship in England, 1890-1990.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 170-73.
[66] Raphael, Adam. 1973. Network of advice planned, *The Guardian*, November 24, 5.

The National Innovations Centre (NIC) was established in 1968 by Michael Young and ran until 1974 when it ran out of funding.[67] It sought ideas from the public as to how to improve people's lives, and then ran pilot studies to test them and to offer a case for take-up by local or central government. Michael Young was a social entrepreneur who straddled political research for the Labour Party, academia, sociological research, and consumer activism. Michael Young's expertise was professional in its origins: he studied economics at the London School of Economics before training as a barrister in the 1930s and taking a PhD in sociology in the 1950s. [68] However, his consumer activism had at its heart listening to working-class women's experiences of shopping and getting value for money. Matthew Hilton and Lawrence Black have looked at the role of the Consumers' Association in promoting the "consumer citizen", a citizenship that supported rational, informed choice and was an alternative to statist, left-wing politics.[69] However, Lise Butler points to how Michael Young was using consumer politics as a means of avoiding either rampant individualism or a deeply impersonal state by bringing the family back into the political arena.[70] As Butler notes, this idea of the family as being integral to emotional and material comfort, and as central to how modern British society should be understood, is key to understanding Michael Young's political views.[71] The NIC, then, was part of Young's wider activism that clustered around the concept of consumption in politics and welfare, but was also centred on using experiential expertise. The NIC's staff were concerned with how communications technology could be used to enable people to "fare well".[72]

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[67] Albery, Nicholas. ed. 1992. *The Book of Visions*. London: Virgin, 236.
[68] Halsey, A. H. 2006. Young, Michael Dunlop, Baron Young of Dartington (1915–2002). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[69] Hilton, Matthew. 2003. *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Black, Lawrence. 2010. *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954-70*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
[70] Butler, Lise. 2020. *Michael Young, Social Science, and the British Left, 1945-1970*.Oxford: Oxford University Press, 168-69.
[71] Butler. *Young*, 185-86.
[72] Albery. *Visions*, 236.

An example of this was the Bath Telephone Advice Service, piloted in 1973. This was the idea of Elizabeth Ackroyd, the Director of the NIC. Ackroyd was a senior civil servant who was the first Director of the Consumer Council, established by the Conservative government in 1963. This work brought her into contact with Michael Young.[73] When the Council was abolished in 1971, Ackroyd joined the NIC.[74] Bath was Ackroyd's choice for this project. The NIC paid for a telephone line and answering machine, whilst the City of Bath paid for the advertising. On calling the Bath Telephone Advice Service number, advice seekers were put through to the relevant recorded message. The topics on offer included "homelessness, allowances, or a disturbed child", as well as "housing advice, information about the attendance allowance for [sic] handicapped children, illiteracy in adults, and an appeal from a group wanting to start a local branch of the Parkinson's Disease Society". Callers could also hear messages from the psychiatrists at the Bath Child and Family Guidance Service on a range of issues. Alfred Austin, of Bath Social Services, told a reporter

> The benefit of this scheme […] is that the caller can retain anonymity and not have to face the challenge of responding to questions. He can simply sit back with the information and think it over. […] We are not sure are being hard-pressed by the right people. It might mean more 'right first time' inquiries – people knowing precisely where to go and what's available and so saving their time and ours.[75]

The phone service was not interactive, and in that way, allowed people to make calls at a time and in a place that suited them, to make repeat calls if they wished, and to digest

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[73] Jones, Margaret. 2004. Ackroyd, Dame (Dorothy) Elizabeth [Betty] (1910–1987). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
[74] Fairhall, John. 1971. Shoppers lose a friend, *The Guardian*, February 19, 1.
[75] Dewar, 1973. Aid on the line, *The Guardian*, October 31, 11.

the material in their own time, without being asked for their details or feeling rushed into acting. These messages contained information and advice that was packaged by the professional, rather than allowing the caller to outline their needs and have the person on the end of the phone respond to that, as was the case with BIT, for example.

State use of the telephone

The benefits of allowing the public to engage with them via a telephone call was also picked up on by the state from the mid 1970s. For example, in 1975, the Labour Government announced a scheme to try to limit wage increases for workers to try to head off high inflation. The Department of Employment offered phone lines for employers and employees with questions about how this would be implemented, which operated between 9am and 6pm on weekdays.[76] An example of a far more substantial version of making government available by phone was the Benefit Agency's Freeline. By the mid-1990s, the Freeline received more than three million calls a year.[77] It was run from eleven Department of Social Security (DSS) centres, and was critical for anyone who found travelling difficult, as well as those who needed information in languages – advice was available in Chinese, Urdu, Punjabi and Welsh.[78] In order to making savings to social security budget, the Social Security Secretary, Peter Lilley, closed the line on 12 July 1996. The Benefits Agency argued that no-one would miss out, as they could phone a local DSS office. A CAB worker told the *Guardian* that they "[the agency] want to go to a public phone box and try to get through to a local office with a query on income support, seeing how long it takes, how much it costs and whether they get the right answer at the end of it".[79] Although the Freeline did not return, the concept of

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[76] 1975. Hotline to dispense advice, *The Guardian*, July 12, 7.
[77] Brindle, David. 1996. End of benefit help line as spending cuts bite, *The Guardian,* July 12, 10.
[78] Wintour, Patrick. 1996. Lilley may close free benefits advice line, *The Guardian*, April 23, 6.
[79] Brindle. End of benefit help line.

connecting people with public services through the telephone or internet became a central tenet of government in the 1990s and early 2000s, as Tony Blair's Labour government sought to catch up with other European nations in relation to e-government.[80]

Conclusion

From the 1960s, marginalised groups challenged the ways in which the state treated them, creating tools and resources that drew upon experiential expertise to help their community "fare well" – and to "fare well" on their own terms. The telephone hotline emerged as a response to the experience of being on the sharp end of policing, using the existing Judges' Rules to carve out a means of getting help in dealing with arrest. With countercultural interest in the democratisation of ideas and information came other ways of organising and accessing knowledge that could be helpful. Whilst some mainstream groups were slow to embrace the telephone hotline – such as the CAB – others were not. Social innovators with influence, like Michael Young and the NIC, were able to work with ideas for telephone-based help and run pilot projects. These ideas permeated government by the 1970s and 1980s, marking a shift away from citizens fitting in with their office opening hours, to offering the public the opportunity to sort out benefits or ask questions about policies at their convenience. Yet, these services could be vulnerable to austerity measures, whatever their value to the public, particularly those with obstacles to visiting in person. The motives of the different groups explored here varied considerably, often reflecting the differences in the types of experiential expertise they had. The telephone helpline was an essential means by which citizens could assert their right to "fare well" within the Welfare State, and to "fare well" on their own terms.

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[80] Left, Sarah. 2001. Blair appoints e-envoy, *The Guardian*, January 31. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2001/jan/31/internetnews1. Accessed 7 September 2023.

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