

Mayor's Youth Office

Jane Driscoll
Director

In 1981, Mayor Sanders established a Task Force on Youth to identify concerns, interests and needs of young people. The primary recommendation of this task force was the creation of an office to provide a voice for young people in City government and the community at large. Thus the Mayor's Youth Office was established.

Through various programs over our first three years we have endeavored to help our young people develop a sense of belonging and a sense of involvement in their community. There were, however, two obstacles we found especially difficult to overcome.

One was the public image of adolescents as they were portrayed by the media. It seemed that the focus was almost always placed, and the light always shone brightest, upon the few delinquent and aberrant acts of our young people rather than the heralding of their triumphs.

Another was the lack of an avenue for expression of their concerns and ideas about issues we all face. Rarely asked and often not listened to, adolescents had little incentive to become involved or to believe that what they felt or said was important — that it could make a difference.

Over the last year, overcoming these obstacles, and consequently, empowering young people has been our priority. By offering a wide range of programs — from youth employment to performing arts — we are attempting to provide our young people with affordable, accessible opportunities which develop competence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging to their community.

Some of the specific programs we have initiated to achieve these goals are listed below.



Performing Arts Program

Our Performing Arts Program has inspired a growing involvement of a diverse group of young people who have become aware of the Youth Office as a vehicle for expressing their ideas and talents. The concepts for the various programs all come from the teenagers and they are involved in the planning and promotion of these events as well as performing in them.

For the third year, we have sponsored **Teenage Band Concerts** in Battery Park showcasing young musicians, dancers, breakers, artists and actors. We also hosted the third **Battle of the Bands** on Halloween this year featuring 11 (!) up-and-coming bands. Approximately 1,000 young people enjoyed this annual event at Memorial Auditorium while downstairs, the Youth Office and the Burlington Police Department hosted a traditional **Halloween Party** for their younger brothers and sisters. Over 800 children dressed up in costumes, played games, dunked for apples, visited a "haunted house" and, all in all, had a wonderful time.

As well as having a **Valentines Day Party** in

the Northgate, Franklin Square and Riverside housing projects, we had a large **Holiday Party** in December in the Auditorium. Entertainment, refreshments and presents were the orders of the day for the more than 400 children and their families. The community support for this event, in terms of fundraising, decorating and wrapping presents was apropos for the season.

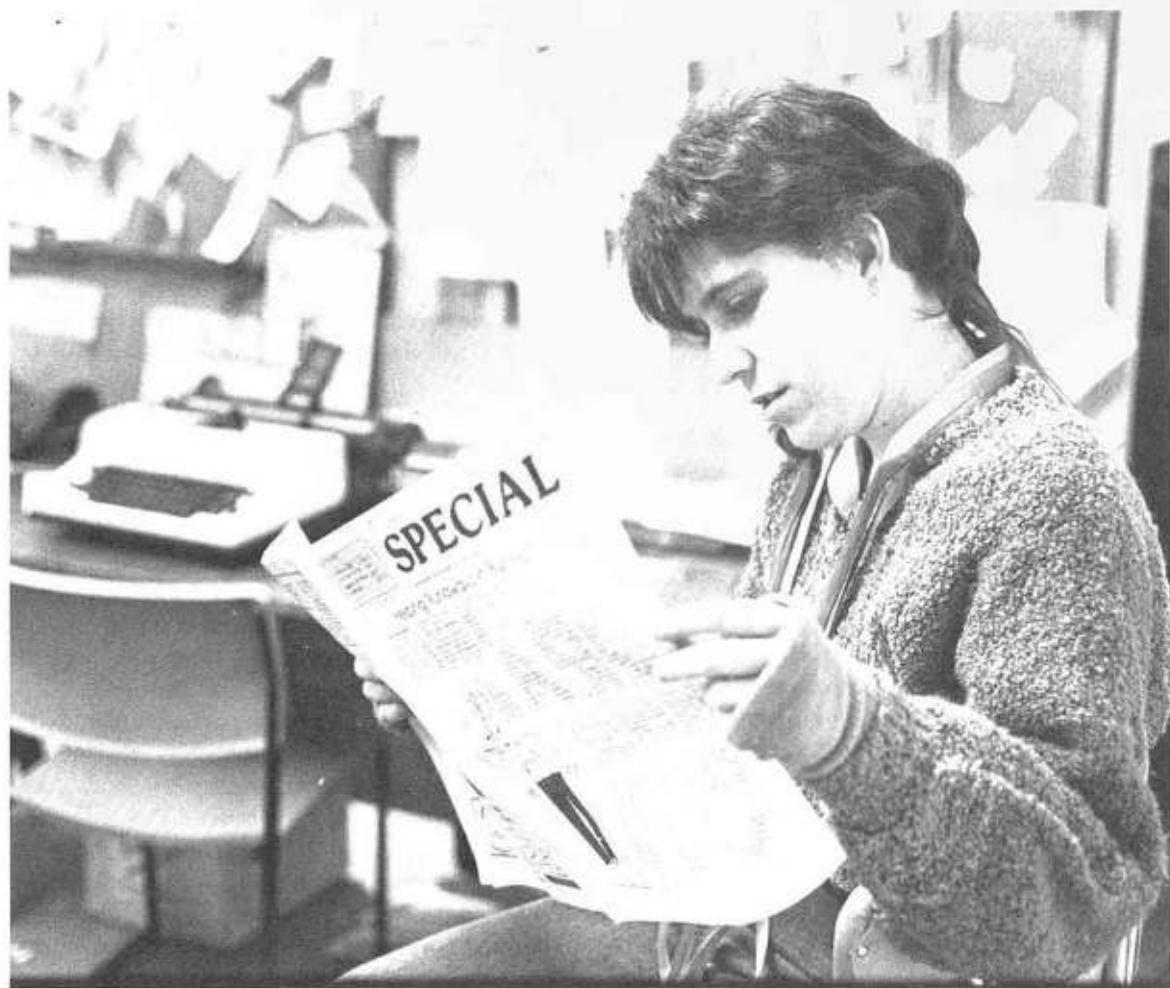
The Youth Office also sponsored the **First Night Teen Event** in Memorial Auditorium (December 1984), and it was a phenomenal success. During the course of the evening, over 8,000 people attended the performances which featured local teenage talent. As always, the teens were involved in all aspects of the event including decorations, publicity, lighting and security, and they gave exciting, exhilarating performances.

The Queen City Special

The *Queen City Special*, a community news-

paper written, designed and organized by Burlington area youth, debuted in March. Over 150 young people have participated in the research, reporting, photography, layout and design of the paper since then. The *Special* contains articles on topics of particular interest to teenagers such as music, film and book reviews, sports activities, teen and community events, school and college overviews and the talents and achievements of their peers. But it also covers issues of concern and importance to all of us. Supreme Court decisions, teenage suicide, future development of the City, the drinking age, national and state elections and foreign and military affairs are just a few of many.

The *Special* has a distribution of 7,000 and enjoys a readership of all ages. As a widely read, respected publication, it provides our teenagers with an opportunity to become involved with and express themselves to their



The Queen City Special has attracted the interest and involvement of youth throughout the City.



Operation Snowshovel.

community — to belong and to exert some influence.

Elderly Programs

The elderly and physically disabled who are living alone often have little or no consistent contact with the community they live in. They have certain needs that have to be met to insure their safety in the event of an emergency or illness. Two of our programs address these concerns.

For some of us, a snowstorm blankets the world in a winter wonderland. For others, snow and ice can virtually imprison them in their homes. **Operation Snowshovel** matches volunteers of all ages with their elderly or handicapped neighbors to provide a much needed snowshoveling service while bringing people together. This year, we have over 150 people participating in this program.

Burlington DIALogue again matches volunteers with senior citizens to provide a daily telephone contact, to reduce their sense of isolation, and to provide information and referral in the event problems occur. This program started as a safety check for those living alone. Every

day at a prearranged time, the person would receive a phone call to ensure everything was all right. If they did not answer, a neighbor would be called. Finally, if necessary, the police would be contacted. We are acting as an emergency crisis service as planned, dealing with two emergencies since the program started. However, alleviating human loneliness has become our main concern. We have changed from a five-minutes-a-day check-in to a 30-minute-a-day friend. Our volunteers are truly building a sense of community and caring through this program.

Foreign Exchange

Last summer, we worked with the Burlington Peace Coalition to sponsor our second **International Work Camp**, a program designed to foster a lasting peace through mutual understanding. We brought 12 energetic young people from seven different countries to our City to provide community service and give Burlingtonians a chance to expand their world view and meet people from other cultures. During the day they labored free of charge painting houses in the Old North End, building a play-



Burlington's Children's Space.

ground for a new child care center and working in social service agencies. In the evening, they got to know many people in our community through shared meals, recreational activities and in-depth discussions.

We also hosted an **Exchange Program** in which 12 West German social workers came to the United States to study the issue of youth unemployment. They stayed in Burlington for two weeks, assisting the work camp in their ventures when possible, and meeting with state and local officials on this issue. They visited work sites and agencies in Springfield, Montpelier and Waterbury as well as in the City and we arranged conferences for them in New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C. as well as Vermont. We are currently working with them on a plan to send a group of Vermont youth service workers over to their country to study their initiatives in this area.

Burlington Children's Space

Child care is in scarce supply in Vermont and Burlington is no exception. **The Burlington Children's Space**, a separate non-profit organization which opened last summer as the result of two years of hard work and dedication, addresses this problem. The center is built

on the belief that child care is a service for children and parents which strengthens, supports and complements the family, the schools and the community and that the availability of affordable, quality child care is a priority. In keeping with this thinking, the Children's Space provides care for 40 children at present, including infants, children with special needs, and those from families of 10 unable to afford this service.

Many, many people have contributed to creating this unique child-size village in Memorial Auditorium, giving it an already rich history. The Burlington Children's Space promises to be a warm, wonderful environment for our children... thanks to the warm wonderful people who created it.

Burlington Youth Employment Program

The Burlington Youth Employment Program, a collaborative program of the State Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services and the City, has now become a non-profit organization with funding from United Way. It has added to its agricultural, weatherization and recycling projects by becoming in-

volved in housing rehabilitation. The first project, a duplex on Manhattan Drive, was extremely successful from both a construction and a youth service standpoint. The house has been completely renovated and will be sold through the Burlington Community Land Trust at a price affordable to a moderate income family and the young participants who worked under the supervision of local unions gained the skills necessary for future employment. Some have been accepted in apprenticeships programs. Possibilities for future rehab work are pouring in from both the public and the private sector in recognition of a job well done.

Other Projects

Two other major projects we are currently working on are the development of a teen center which will be built by the teenagers themselves and the drafting of legislation on issues of concern to families. These include child abuse, sexual assault, DWI and child care, to name

just a few.

Along with other ventures, such as the Old North End Little League, scheduling free pool time for the YMCA, guest speakers, sports programs, etc., the Youth Office serves several other basic functions. We advise the Mayor on youth-related issues, work with other agencies on the coordination of resources, and provide a referral service. The office also acts as an advocate in City government for youth. We are there to talk with young people and their families about their concerns or to guide them to appropriate resources in the community.

In closing, we give our sincere thanks to the many volunteers who have made our programs a success and extend an invitation to all Burlingtonians to join us in future activities.

Board of Directors: John Burchard, Gloria Gil, Jane Kramer, Greg Packan.

Staff: Kathy Lawrence, Scott Simpson, Barbara Prine, Edna Falk, Mathias Dubilier.



Mayor's Youth Office Staff Scott Simpson, Jane Driscoll, Kathy Lawrence.