

Mayor's Youth Office

Jane Driscoll, Director

In 1981, Mayor Bernard Sanders formed the Mayor's Task Force on Youth to identify concerns, interests and needs of young people and to recommend how the City might address them. The creation of a Youth Office to involve young people in the community around them by providing opportunities to participate and to develop competence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging was their primary recommendation. It was hoped that the office would provide an avenue for expression of their concerns and ideas and would encourage them to realize that what they felt or said was important — that it could, indeed, make a difference.

In our short span of five years, we have accomplished a great deal more than we had anticipated, and have realized how much more there is still left to be done. The young people in our programs are demonstrating youth empowerment in action, now relying on us more for guidance and support than for structure or implementation. They view the Youth Office as their office, to meet their needs, to create new challenges and opportunities, and to develop their own responses to issues that concern them.

In addition, the Youth Office is an effective advocacy organization, representing the needs, as we see them, of our most vulnerable populations, the very young and the elderly.

Some of the specific programs we have initiated and devoted our energies to are listed below:

Child Care

Clearly, one of the most critical needs facing families today is child care. It is a basic support service, necessary to enable families — and especially single parent families — to be self-sufficient and independent. Child care has consistently been a top priority in our office and we are proud to say that we have made significant progress in this area.

In 1984, we created the Burlington Children's Space, a child care center which provides full and part-time care, care for children with special needs, and infant care for approximately 50 families, all on a sliding fee scale. Now a separate, non-profit organization, the Children's Space continues to serve the community as an independent entity.

This year Mayor Sanders established a special



SHEILAH CROWLEY

task force on child care comprised of people knowledgeable in this field to develop an ideal after-school program for Burlington. We met throughout the winter and developed a pilot program for the Edmunds School which started in early March. Offering drama, art, sports and other activities, it combined the best features of child care, education and recreation and served an average of 15 children per day. The success of the program, starting so late in the year, demonstrated the need for school age child care and the desire that age group has for expanded enrichment opportunities in a nurturing environment. We collaborated with the YMCA to ensure that the children experienced positive social interaction as well as artistic, expressive and emotional growth and that they and their parents had input into the program through evaluation and activity selection.

The pilot program was very successful, as evidenced by the parents' letters and evaluations, discussions with principals and responses from the children themselves. At the end of the school year we recommended to the City and the School Board that we continue and expand the school age program in Edmunds and H.O. Wheeler schools. Thanks to their support and the support of the Child Care Resource and Referral Center we will be able to serve an average of 50 children per day during the 1986-87 school year in our new CITY KIDS Child Care/Enrichment Program.

Community Service

Operation Snowshovel — For some of us, a snow storm blankets the world in a winter wonderland. For some of our elderly and physically disabled population, snow and ice can virtually imprison them in their homes. Operation Snowshovel recruits youth and other volunteers to shovel their sidewalks and driveways to ensure their safety in the event of an emergency or illness. Almost 200 people participated in the program last winter.

Foreign Exchange — Each year, the Youth Office hosts an International Peace Work Camp, a program designed to foster a lasting peace through mutual understanding. Last summer, fifteen young people from eight different countries came to Burlington to work alongside our teenagers and to provide community services.

Burlington was also one of several cities in the United States, including New York, Boston and

Philadelphia, chosen as a site for a group of human service professionals from Africa to visit. During their stay, we introduced them to many of the leading people in the field in our area, brought them to visit several youth serving organizations and enabled them to participate in the Work Camp.

Queen City Special

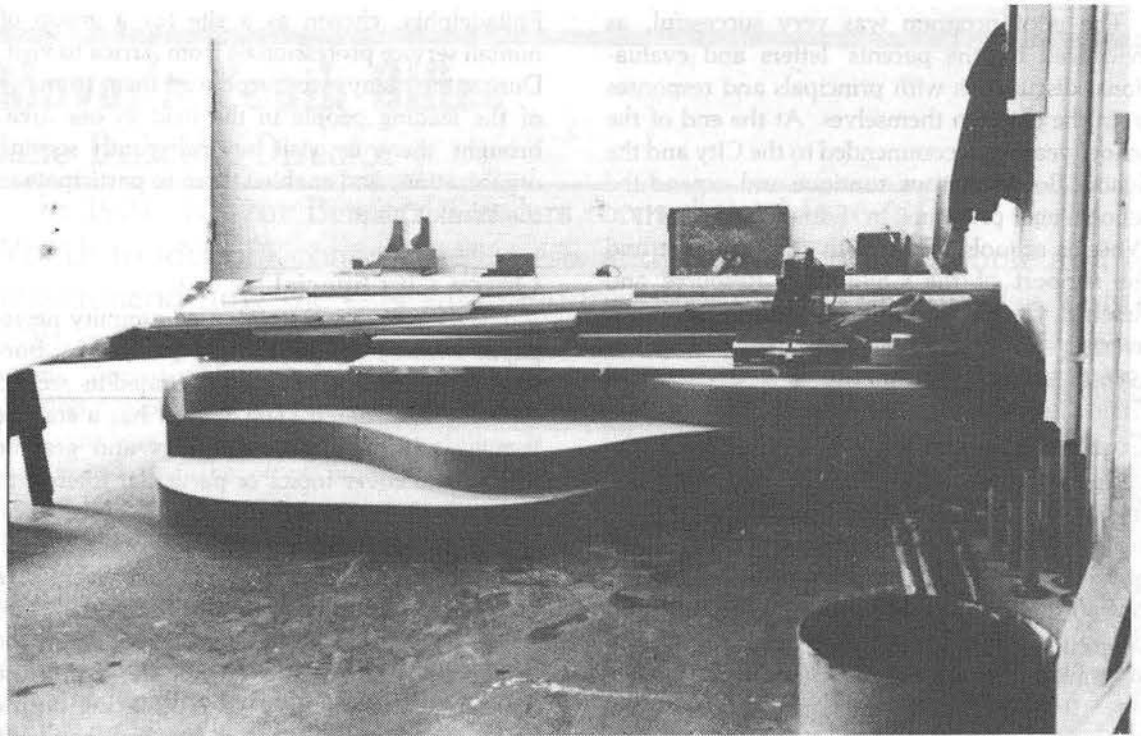
The Queen City Special, a community newspaper written, designed and organized by Burlington area young people, celebrated its second birthday last March. The Special has a staff of teenage reporters, photographers and graphic artists who cover topics of particular interest to teenagers such as music, film and book reviews, sports activities, teen and community events, and profiles of their peers. They also cover issues of concern and interest to all of us. Acid rain, self-images, runaways, school budgets and the drinking age are just a few of the topics the Special tackled this past year. Working on the newspaper, young people understand they have the power to influence and inform their peers and thus make an effort to become aware of issues and events in the community.

Each issue of the Queen City Special has a distribution of 7,000 and a loyal readership of many different ages. Unfortunately, this year we have decided that due to the rising costs of production and an inadequate number of advertisers, we will be publishing on a less frequent basis.



Kathy Lawrence of the Youth Office

SHELAH CROWLEY



The stage at 242 Main.

Legislation

Over the last two years, the Youth Office has played a significant advocacy role in the legislature on issues of concern to children and families. We have drafted and lobbied for legislation to allow for videotaped examinations, expansion of evidentiary privilege, upgrading of lewd and lascivious conduct to sexual assault of a minor, extension of the statute of limitations to six years, an extension of the rape shield law to the deposition process and stricter enforcement of DWI laws. Many of our efforts have been successful and we intend to continue our work in this area.

Performing Arts

The performing arts program of the Youth Office has brought young aspiring artists together with local professionals, community leaders and reviewers. It has provided public showcases for young people to display their talents in all art forms, allowing them to develop their talents, gain some self-confidence and enjoy a sense of belonging in their community. The various projects are decided upon by the teenagers themselves and they are involved in all aspects of development, including the planning and promotion of these events as well as the performances.

The highlight of the performing arts program

is the Battle of the Bands, which had to be split into two events this year due to the interest of so many young musicians.

Teen Center

Each year Burlington receives approximately \$1 million in Community and Economic Development Funds from the federal government, and each year the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and the City Council decide to spend some of that money on youth programs. Last spring, we sent out our Queen City Special reporters to ask young people what they thought the City needed and, in particular, what kids needed. Interestingly, the recommendations for the City at large were almost identical to those given by the adults, while the recommendations for youth programs differed drastically. The concepts for programs from the adults tended to be more problem-oriented, (i.e., drug abuse, unemployment, truancy) while the concepts from the kids themselves tended to bring them together because of common interests or talents rather than common problems.

Time and time again, the need for a community youth center came up. Teenagers told us they wanted a place to socialize, meet, play games, eat, hang out, play music, perform, hold forums, etc. In response to this, we worked with some young people to submit a proposal to the

City for a Teen Center in Memorial Auditorium and the City supported this request.

Over the last year, much of our energy was spent actually constructing the Center with the assistance of the Burlington Area Vocational-Technical Center and the guidance and support of David Sellers and Company. Teenagers from all over Chittenden County were intricately involved with every aspect of the establishment of this Center, ranging from design, carpentry work and paint schemes to menu preparation, entertainment selection, and policy decisions.

Known now as 242 MAIN, the Center offers a full service snackbar, an art gallery, open mike coffeehouses, bands and dancing, workshops and forums.

The atmosphere varies depending on the day and the time, from an after-school ice cream parlor to a club. The menu ranges from the ever-popular burgers, fries and onion rings and soda to an assortment of delicious desserts and the best coffee in town.

We found the interest in the arts to be even greater than we had anticipated and the visual arts and performing arts components are flourishing. Young painters, sculptors and photographers display their work in the 242 MAIN Art Gallery; poets, vocalists, playwrights and actors perform every Friday night in our coffeehouse; while musicians and bands perform to a dancing crowd on Saturday nights.

We would especially like to thank the professional arts and music community in Burlington which has responded warmly and contributed much to the Teen Center. Local bands such as Joined at the Head, Screaming Broccoli, Hollywood Indians and Miss Bliss have provided musical as well as technical support and other artists such as Max Schumann and Ed Owre have donated their considerable talents. 242 MAIN has become a place where professional and young artists can work and create together — and we're grateful to the many people who have made this possible.

