

Toughest ones worry

Here's a tale of how youths wind up in the village

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

In a smoke-filled office of Children's Village, Suzanne Farran and three colleagues talked about juvenile delinquents and how they end up in the Oakland County detention center.

They're underachievers, mostly from broken homes whose parents are socially uneducated with poor parenting skills, they said.

"It's not uncommon to see human beings here that are cold, with no conscience," Ms. Farran added.

Ms. Farran is supervisor of treatment services at Children's Village in Pontiac. The center is operated by and is part of the Juvenile Division of the Probate Court.

Children's Village has seven small individual residential units with a total bed capacity of 239. Residents are separated according to sex. It also has a central kitchen and school, whose teachers are employed by the Waterford School District.

WHEN A PERSON under age 17 is picked up by police for committing a crime, the officer assesses the problem and decides whether the youth should be petitioned to juvenile court.

If the decision is to prosecute, the officer sends a file to the court's intake referee, who decides if the case should be tried in court. Many times the intake referee determines that the youngster needs counseling rather than a court trial.

However, if a youth is tried in court and the judge finds him guilty, it's very likely he would be sentenced to time in a Children's Village building. Sentences run from three to 12 months, depending on the youth's criminal history and seriousness of the offense.

Some detention buildings are tightly secure. Others allow the youth to roam the campus during "free time." There are also areas for children who are neglected or abuse cases, and are awaiting placement in foster homes.

"The delinquent cases we have here have committed armed robbery assault with a deadly weapon, drunk and disorderly, repeated cases of drunk driving, larceny and malicious destruction of property," Judge Norman Barnard said.

"We have two child care sites that are secure where we keep people on felony charges prior to their court

dates. We get about four boys for every girl."

HABITUAL OFFENDERS picked up on felony charges are immediately taken to Building J, which has a bed capacity for 36 boys. Girls are taken to A Building, which is the same type of facility with 22 beds.

The units are self-contained with schools, arts and crafts activities and gyms. Youths earn their way out of the building, on a point system, for following rules. Most comply with regulations, Mrs. Farran said.

"Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish whether they're following the rules because they're scared or because they want to reform," said Marlene Bensch, staff psychologist.

From J and A, youths are usually placed in another program, to serve the remaining time of their sentences. Three modern cottages provide open programs and rehabilitation units for children who are unable to return to the community because of behavior patterns which need intervention through treatment.

ALL THREE units serve the average age group from 13-17.

• B Building is a six- to nine-month behavior modification program.

• C Building is a 10-week behavior modification program.

• D Building is an open-ended (no fixed term) program built on the level system which provides graduates to independence as the youths work their way through the levels. D also houses boys awaiting other programs such as Camp Oakland (a private corporate foundation for court wards and underprivileged children), private placements or foster care.

• G Building is an open-ended program based on the level system for girls aged 12-17. The 24-bed building also houses girls awaiting alternative placements.

"GIRLS ARE much harder to deal with than boys," Ms. Bensch said. "In a courtroom, some are more skilful at playing the innocent victim than boys."

Mike Worrell, a boys counselor in Building J, said the major offenders are easier to work with than the misdemeanants.

"They're sweating. You get a 15-year-old in here for murder and he's very likely to be worried that he'll be tried as an adult, so he's easy to manage," Worrell said.



photos by DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

ABOVE: There's plenty of time for youths to play pool with supervisors in D Building of the Children's Village, but the delinquent youths must first earn their way into the free environments. BELOW: "Steven Duncan" has never been to high school and has spent most of his teen-age years in detention institutions.



spent one day in North Farmington High School, then dropped out.

"I started doing a lot of heavy drinking and stealing cars. If I would start drinking early in the day, I'd drink two fifths of whiskey," he said.

"I'd drink so much I'd black out and not remember anything. Once I broke into a house and stole a car and didn't know I did it until the police came to my house where the car was parked."

STEVEN SUPPORTED himself by stealing jewelry and silver from neighborhood homes and selling it to pawn shops. He used the money for booze and drugs — LSD, speed and pot.

He even attempted suicide after a drinking binge and was sent to Clinton Valley Center for treatment. But Steven didn't like detention institutions of any sort, so he fled from them, constantly racking up truancy charges. Because he was a juvenile, he was always returned to the Oakland County Probate Court.

Paper work and court adjournments kept Steven on the streets. He slept at friends' houses and at his own home during the day while his mother worked. Finally, his case worker and mother convinced him to turn himself in to the court.

"I heard the cops were looking for me, and things were getting rough, so they talked me into turning myself in," he said.

STEVEN HAS rejected drug rehabilitation therapy at various state hospitals, but changed his tune in Children's Village.

For the first 1½ months at the Village, Steven was housed in J Building, a closely supervised, locked facility. Residents must earn their way out of J Building by following rules.

On Oct. 19, 1981, Steven was transferred to D building, where he participated in a 10-week behavior modification program. It's open-ended. The youths may roam the building unsupervised and go home on weekends. The residents attend a school on the campus and help prepare their meals.

They have group discussion sessions and help one another tackle their problems. It's their last sense of security before being released to the adult world. "I feel a lot better about myself now," said Steven. "I got a lot accomplished, but sometimes I think I don't want to leave this place. I'm not sure I can jump back in the mainstream."

Concert canceled

Due to the pending reorganization of the West Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra and its board of directors, the Sunday night concert is canceled.

The WBSDO hopes to reschedule the performance.

Several board members recently resigned along with executive director Carolyn Muir.

Remaining board members plan to restructure the organization at a meeting Tuesday night.

The Eccentric will have more details on this situation in Monday's edition.

Steven's story: next time he'll go to jail

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

On the surface 17-year-old Steven Duncan looks like an average high school student.

He has curly hair, wears a T-shirt bearing a rock and roll band emblem and blue jeans. His tennis shoes are frayed and his speech is tough. He drops the final letters from words and answers questions with "yeah."

But Steven (not his real name; it was chosen to protect his identity) has never been to high school. He hardly spent a day in junior high. Instead, he spent most of his adolescence in institutions.

"I really regret half the stuff I missed. I never completed a full year of school, and I've never been to a school dance," he said.

Steven has been convicted of breaking and entering, stealing cars, shoplifting, assault, vandalism and possession of stolen weapons.

"I've been in and out of the court system since 1978. I was always doing what I wanted, and the cops got sick of the vandalism I was doing, so they finally started arresting me," he said.

TODAY, STEVEN is nearing probation.

He has been in the Oakland County Children's Village for five months and says he is almost rehabilitated. Now legally an adult, he knows that the next time he breaks the law, juvenile detention centers, with understanding counselors, won't be an option.

"If I mess up, it's across the street for me," he said, indicating the Oakland County Jail. "The thought of jail scares me."

When Steven talks about life after detention, he tries to be positive, but notes that "anything is possible."

"I've got my (driver's) license, I'm working on getting my GED (general educational development test), and when I get out I'll out drinking. But there's a chance I could get caught for drunk driving or something," he added.

STEVEN BEGAN his lawbreaking adolescence at 14 when he moved from Livonia to Farmington Hills. His father had recently died, and he lived with his mother and stepfather.

"I started out just breaking into neighborhood houses under construction and hanging out there with my friends. The cops would catch us, and then my stepfather would beat me with a broomstick," he recalled.

"After a couple of months in junior high, I got kicked out for lighting a kid's paper on fire," he said, adding that he had been suspended several times previously for starting food fights and smoking cigarettes in the lavatory.

AFTER A SERIES of arrests for home incorrigibility, Steven said he was sent to Starr Commonwealth, a self-help institution in Albion, for six months. When released, Steven returned home to find his mother in the process of divorce.

At his mother's request, Steven spent the summer in Colorado with his married sister until the divorce was final. He returned in September 1979,

Parks and rec sponsors Toronto, holiday get-a-way

A variety of travel adventures to please almost everyone's tastes and pocketbook are offered by West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation.

Visit Toronto is slated for April 5-8 via rail with three nights at the Westin Hotel for \$155 per person double occupancy in the Club Car or \$145 per person double occupancy in the Coach Car.

Among the spots to visit in Toronto are restaurants, a medieval castle, shopping centers and a major exhibit at the art gallery.

Tour price includes round-trip transportation, hotel, transfers and a wine and cheese party in Toronto.

Registration deadline is Friday, March 5 by calling parks at 334-5660.

The department also plans a Canary Island tangent during Easter vacation, April 8-16, at \$599 per person.

This tour includes a non-stop flight and seven

nights at the Maritim Apartments.

All Maritim Hotel facilities are available to the apartment guests.

For those wishing hotel-style accommodations, a deluxe package is available at \$729 per person at the Maritim Hotel.

The hotel has two large pools, tennis courts and sauna.

Registration deadline is March 8.

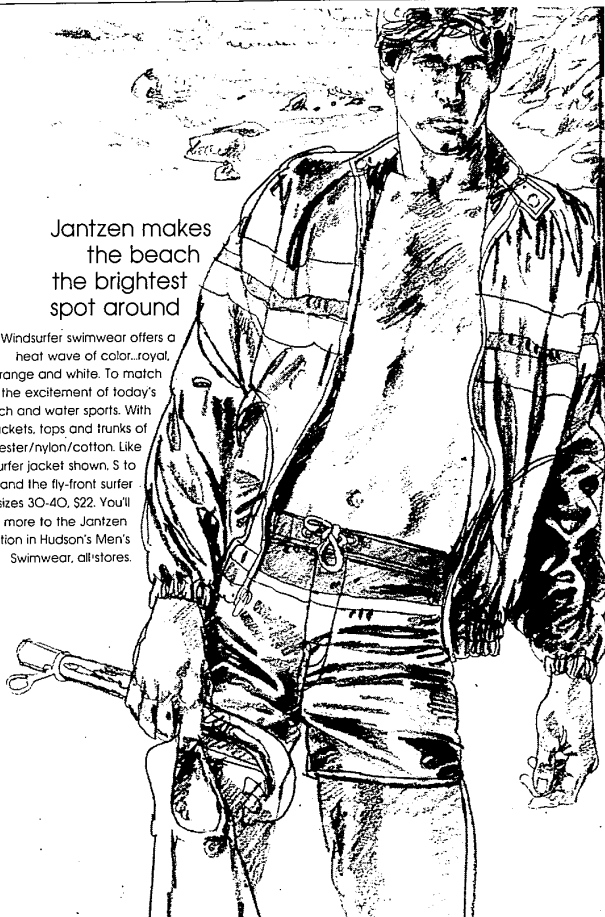
The department also offers a one-day trip May 11 to Washington, D.C. for \$119 per person. This tour includes round-trip plane fare, continental breakfast, lunch at Shollys Colonial Cafeteria, motorcoach sightseeing and round-trip transfers.

Another one-day which to the 1983 World's Fair is June 30 at \$139 per person including airfare, transfers, entrance fees, breakfast and dinner en route.

For more details on any of these trips, call Pat Riney at 334-5660.

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Windsurfer swimwear offers a heat wave of color, royal, orange and white. To match the excitement of today's beach and water sports. With jackets, tops and trunks of polyester/nylon/cotton. Like the surfer jacket shown, S to XL, \$35; and the fly-front surfer trunks, sizes 30-40, \$22. You'll find lots more to the Jantzen collection in Hudson's Men's Swimwear, all stores.



HUDSON'S men's store