

Arts, literature provide 'lap time'

This is the second in a two-part series on how Oakland County Youth Assistance uses cultural exposure to help troubled youngsters.

By Virginia Lee Clark
special writer

The individual school districts are picking up the ball. Working closely with schools in their areas, they are offering many cultural opportunities to both students and their parents to grow and learn.

Ayondale schools planned after-school activities that included an opportunity to learn a foreign language and involvement with a theater troupe.

"Every year we take young people in our area to 'Noel Night' in Detroit," said Ruth Jordan from the Pontiac Youth Assistance office. "It is the first Wednesday in December and we visit the library, the Historical Museum, the African American Institute and the International House where special programs have been planned."

ART PROJECTS and art contests are popular. Young artists at one school were invited to paint murals on the building's walls. The cover of the 1989-90 Oakland County Directory of Human Resources features a winning painting by an 11-year-old Auburn Hills boy "Peace Begins at Home" was the theme of the competition.

Bringing the family closer together is one of the major goals of all Youth Assistance workers.

"Kids need more lap time," said Beverly Creigs, professor of social work at Wayne State University.

Libraries in several communities offer storytimes for their younger residents. Some programs are in the evening designed particularly for children whose parents work during the day. The youngsters are even encouraged to come in their pajamas. Obviously, these programs are aimed toward younger children, but are viewed by Youth Assistance workers as positive steps in the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

THE USE OF live theater for both entertainment and education in many communities and schools has proven to be one of the most effective tools that the Youth Assistance program has used. In 1983 they approached Crossroads Productions Ltd., a Redford-based professional touring theater company to do a community service production about alcoholism, "One for the Road" by television dramatist Irving Vendig was the result. The 30-minute play is about three teenage girls who drink and drive causing the death of one of them. It has been performed in many Oakland County schools and educators agree that its message gets across much more forcefully than any lecture they could give. This is known as synergy "the total effect is greater than the sum of its parts."

Crossroads now offers other plays specializing in social issues among their repertoire, including "My Name is Pam Rogers and I Have AIDS" and "Running On High."

"After students in a Rochester school saw their production of 'My Family Divorced' a dialogue opened up that had never occurred before," said Al Kaczowski, a Youth Assistance Program supervisor in volunteer programs and special projects. "Kids who had buried their anxieties about their parent's divorce talked freely and honestly. It was amazing."

Theatre Arts Productions is another drama group contributing to Youth Assistance programs. Their collaboration brought "Bullyman Encounter" to 80 elementary schools in Oakland County. It graphically yet appropriately portrays techniques to help youngsters avoid the dangers of sexual abuse.

MARTHA KELLER, a long-time Birmingham resident, is a writer and former producer of television shows for children. At present she is writing "And Then What Happened?" stories and reading them to children at local schools and libraries. Then they work with their "Auntie Martha" to create their own theatrical productions based on her story beginnings.

"Martha Keller is an advocate of the Youth Assistance Program who really gets involved," said Richard Thibodeau, community organization specialist with Oakland County Youth Assistance. "And the kids just love her."

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Youth Assistance authors family fun book

The Oakland County Youth Assistance Program has published a resource guide for all families in Metro Detroit, in which many cultural activities are listed.

The Family Fun Book and Wellness Guide is a 400-page book which is a complete guide to family enrichment activities that cuts across all economic and educational lines.

It includes chapters on home activities, things to do and see in the metro area, outdoor suggestions, hobbies, family sports, youth organizations, theater groups, music, dance and art.

Richard Thibodeau is editor-in-chief.

Dr. Katherine M. Wood, professor at Rutgers University, said about the paperback, "It is refreshing to find especially a court service that focuses as much on strengths of the family as on its dysfunctions."

It is available at area Walden Bookstores for \$5.50 or by sending a check for \$16.50 which covers postage and mailing to Oakland County Coordinating Council, Inc. 1269 N. Telegraph Road, Pontiac, Mich. 48053.

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