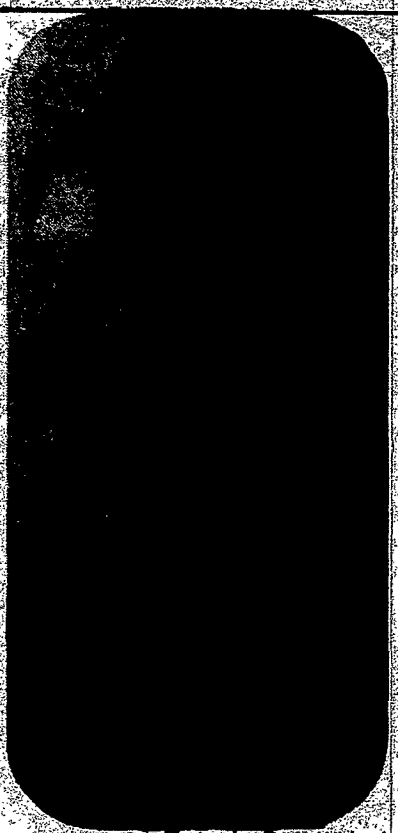


Sandy Sanderson



Phyllis 'Phyl' Thomas



Ginny Henneberry

Photos by Dave Witbeck

# The Center — A Place Where Runaways Can Stop to Think

By PAT PETRASKE

"If you flunk a subject one more time, don't bother coming home." Many an irate parent screams such words in exasperation over a child's latest report card. Sometimes the child takes them seriously and doesn't bother to go home.

The number of runaway children is on the rise; estimates show that approximately 130 runaways are approaching Monroe County agencies each month for help. More and more of these youths are turning to a "place for youth run by youth." The Center, 293 Alexander St., is a counseling, informational and referral agency which operates a Runaway Advocacy Project.

Ginny Henneberry, one of the three counselors, divides the runaways into two classes, "those who run to, and those who run from." Running to means leaving home for fun, excitement or adventure. The Center has few services for those looking for a free ride, Miss Henneberry said.

On the other hand, running from means a flight in desperation. What has happened is often the last straw, the final injustice that makes a young person feel that he or she can no longer handle the home situation.

A 15-year-old girl finds herself pregnant. Her parents just wouldn't understand.

A young boy is hit in anger by his parents. What is worse than the pain is the "verbal degradation" that accompanies the blow.

For months a distraught young girl threatens "If you do that one more time, I'll run away." Her parents are flabbergasted when one day they discover that the girl actually has fled.

The Center's runaway project was established with funds from the Federal Division of Criminal Justice and the State Division for Youth. Previously there had not been any coordinated effort in the county to handle the social, economic and legal problems faced by runaways and their parents.

Researching these problems is another member of the staff, Mike Jacobson, a student at the University of Rochester.

The Center is unique in that it functions in a youth advocacy role, said a third staff member, Sandy Sanderson, a bespectacled man with a flowing black beard.

"We offer alternatives," Miss Henneberry interjected. "Before, the young people had no say in their fate, no say in the decision-

making process. They were considered criminals and often were shuffled through the Children's Shelter or Family Court and were eventually brought back home."

Sanderson is confident that their approach is working. "This is often the first time in a young person's life that they have been treated this way. We tell him that he has made his decision, now how does he want to carry it through," he said.

The Center, which sponsors a 24 hour crisis service to runaways, only offers alternatives and does not tell the runaways what to do.

"Some runaways say 'Fix my life, fix my parents. We try to show them that they are a person responsible for their actions,'" Miss Henneberry said.

While running away may ease the initial conflict, it also opens a nest of legal complications. Running away is against the law for anyone under the age of 16 in New York State. The law also states that a person over 16 may leave home if he is able to support himself. However, his parents may have legal recourse if it is found that the person is in an unhealthy living situation. If a person under the age of 16 wishes to get a job, he must secure working papers which require parental signatures. Six volunteer lawyers are on call to handle legal questions.

The Center plans to have four foster homes available for temporary placement within three weeks, and more are needed to take the place of "crash pads."

Phyllis Thomas, The Center's coordinator of counseling services, believes the idea that youths encounter drugs and sex-related experiences while away from home "is not that much of a myth."

The temporary provision of a foster home usually is a last resort. Often all that is needed is counseling to the youths and their parents.

"We always encourage the young people to call their parents just to let them know that they are safe," Miss Henneberry said.

Parental reaction to the first runaway experience is usually outrage. "I want my child back," exclaimed one parent when asked for permission to place his child in a foster home. Permission to provide housing is required for children under 16 and parents of 16 and 17 year-olds are notified within 24 hours.

"But after a child has run away from home eight or ten times, parents realize that the home life is not working," said Miss

Henneberry, who formulated a screening process for foster families. A home visit and several interviews and group counseling sessions are part of this process.

A member from The Center's Youth Advisory Board, which has seven high school students, accompanies the staff on the home visit. "Someone from that age bracket knows what kids like. He may notice something which we might overlook about a particular home," Sanderson explained. The advisory board attends The Center's monthly meetings and is involved in hiring and policy decisions.

Runaway Advocacy Project Foster Families must meet three requirements: provide a sleeping place that could be anything from a sleeping bag on a couch to a separate room, assume the costs of feeding the runaway (other needs such as clothing, counseling and medical care will be met by The Center) and be covered by a homeowner's policy or its equivalent. The services of a social worker from the Catholic Family Center are also available.

An average stay at a foster home is one or two nights, although runaways are allowed to remain in the temporary housing for two weeks. "People who need an interim family are usually angry and hurt and need time to think about what's happened to them and get over their crisis. It's a way to cool off," said one foster parent.

"If a kid feels strongly enough after two weeks, then he can go through the courts. For example, it's ridiculous to expect a person who has been abused or beaten to go back home," Sanderson noted.

# Priest-Lawyer Wins Right To Wear Collar in Court

New York [RNS] — A criminal judge's ruling barring a lawyer who is also a Roman Catholic priest from wearing his clerical collar in the courtroom was overturned by a New York Supreme Court justice here.

Justice Guy Mangano, in a 11-page decision, upheld an appeal by Father Vincent LaRocca, a Legal Aid Society attorney representing in court a welfare client accused of attacking a public school teacher.

Two months ago, Criminal Court Judge Morgan Lane told Father LaRocca to remove his clerical collar during the trial on the grounds that it would prejudice the jury in favor of his client.

Judge Lane said he would have no objection to the collar if the trial were being held without a jury.

After a lengthy courtroom discussion involving the priest, the judge and the assistant district attorney, Judge Lane adjourned the trial. He advised the defendant — Mrs. Cecilia Daniels, a mother of four who is on welfare — to return in two weeks with another attorney or with Father LaRocca in non-clerical attire.

When the priest appealed the ruling by Judge Lane, Mrs. Daniels was freed on her own recognizance.

Justice Mangano, in his decision, said "this court finds no statutes or court rules that restrict a clergyman from being admitted to the bar in the State of New York or place limitations on his usual attire."

"There is no statutory presumption of prejudice against a religious collar, cloak, skullcap or other distinctive symbol of a religion or people," he stated.

Father LaRocca, ordained to the priesthood in 1949, taught at

Cathedral Prep Seminary for more than 12 years. He has degrees from St. John's University, Fordham University and Columbia University, all in New York.

Father LaRocca, a priest of the Brooklyn diocese in good standing but unassigned, originally told Judge Lane that the only "respectable manner" of dress for himself is the "Roman Catholic collar of a priest."

The Legal Aid Society, with whom the priest serves, supported him in his appeal.

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