

Charles Settlement House: Service to All Ages, Needs

By the Charles Settlement House at 441 1st St. and 1st Ave. is a vibrant, a place of activity. The building always bustling with people, the Charles Settlement House has been a part of the neighborhood since 1872. It has been a place of service to all ages and needs. The Charles Settlement House has been a place of service to all ages and needs. The Charles Settlement House has been a place of service to all ages and needs.



Gail Blanchard, executive director of the Charles Settlement House.

The Charles Settlement House offers a host of services to the neighborhood, bound by Lyall Avenue to the north and West Avenue to the south, and Broad Street to the east to the city line. The Settlement offers services to all in the community - including those with low income, to families, the elderly and youth. Its programs reach virtually every age range and many of the social needs of the community. Last year the Charles House served in some way over 8,000 people.

The Charles Settlement works closely with area parishes such as St. Peter and Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, Holy Apostles and Holy Family, also with Trinity United Church and Lake Avenue Baptist Church. Gail Blanchard, executive director of the Charles Settlement, said of the parishes: "They're very willing to work together on projects like food and clothing drives."

Recent case studies by the Charles House and area parishes join together to serve the elderly, provide a job and have a next door. Through work with the parishes and Charles House, neighborhood volunteers plan for the human services needs of the community.

"Charles House has a long history with the Catholic Charities movement," said Bill Privett, associate director of Catholic Charities. "It incorporates our values in the neighborhood where church agencies should be most visible. The revitalization of the Charles House is an exciting project as it must be from the neighborhood. Gail Blanchard and Fred Meyer, the executive director of the settlement for their last year. We are also quite pleased to see the stronger relationship between the Settlement House and the parishes."

Volunteers form the backbone of Charles House activities. Ms. Blanchard tells of past years of 20 to 30 Charles House volunteers, the number recently reached near 150. She credits the increase with a rise in the number of those who receive assistance in some form from the Settlement, and, in turn, volunteer in other programs. "A healthy and self-sustaining process. As the number of people to be served in the community has risen, so has the activities of area residents in volunteering in and advocating for programs and services for the neighborhood."

While the Charles Settlement looks forward to the results of the human services needs assessment, many of

the problems reported in the study are already felt in the settlement. Ms. Blanchard believes that some of the most basic problems the Charles House staff encounter are the number of single parents, the elderly, and youth problems related to drugs and alcohol. The Charles House hopes to tailor its programs to the needs revealed and documented in the study.

Yet the Charles House certainly seems to have its finger on the pulse of the community now. Present programs include food cabinets and clothing closets, an emergency food pool, and landlord arbitration. The Settlement also has a "mother's club" to support, maintain, control, and operate two senior recreation sites, a summer day camp, a teen council, and youth and sports clubs. The Charles Settlement also works extensively to refer those in need to other community and social service agencies when appropriate.

Ms. Blanchard said that at the Charles House, they aim to keep the atmosphere informal. "The newcomers and new poor find it the hardest to come in," she said, "so we try to avoid appointments; people in need are welcome here and served on a walk-in basis."

Bill Privett said of the Settlement, "Everyone is aware from news reports where our social and economic problems lie. I think that an agency like Charles Settlement can have dramatic effect in its own neighborhood by offering hope and care to the young and old, the blacks, Hispanics, and whites."

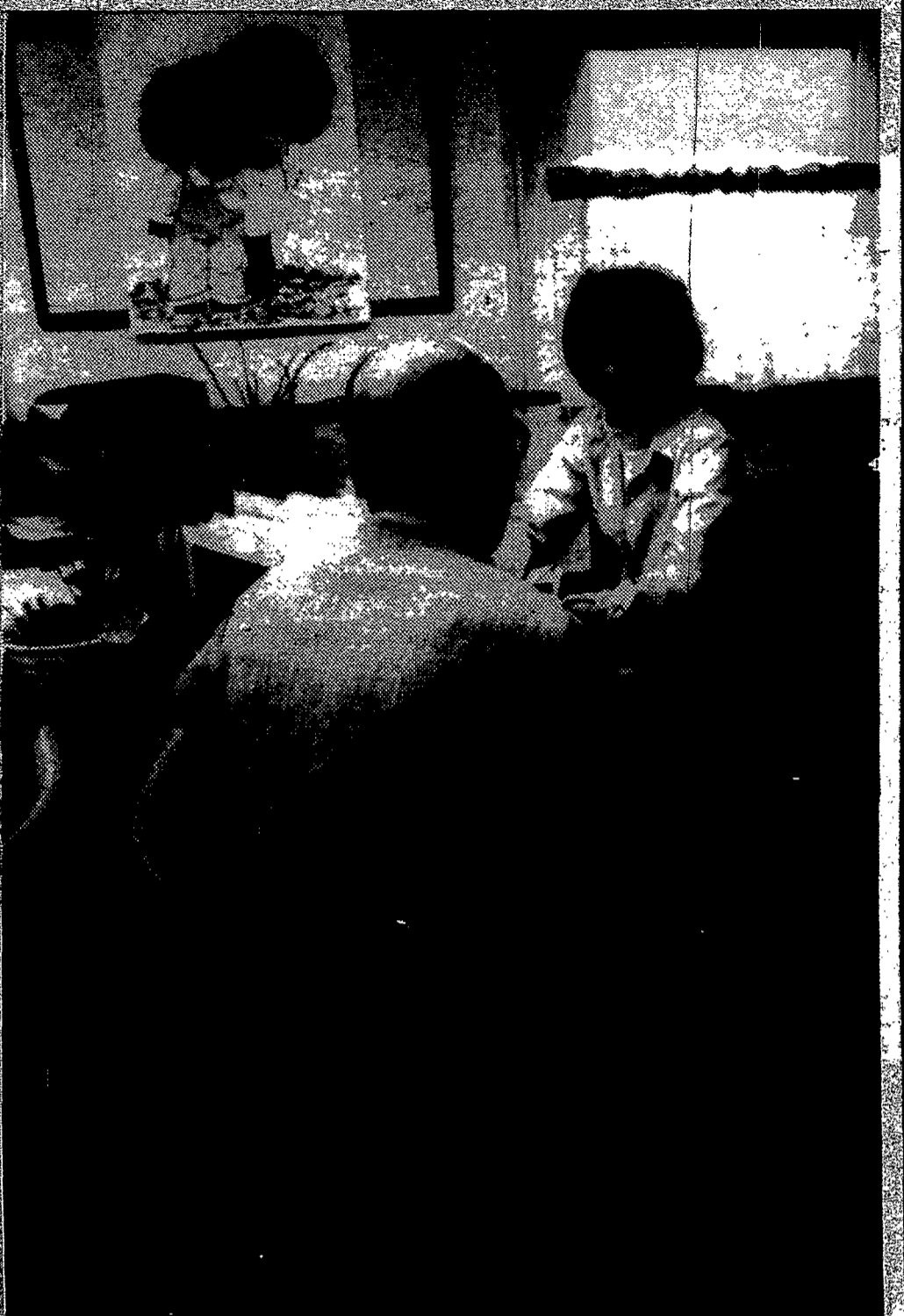
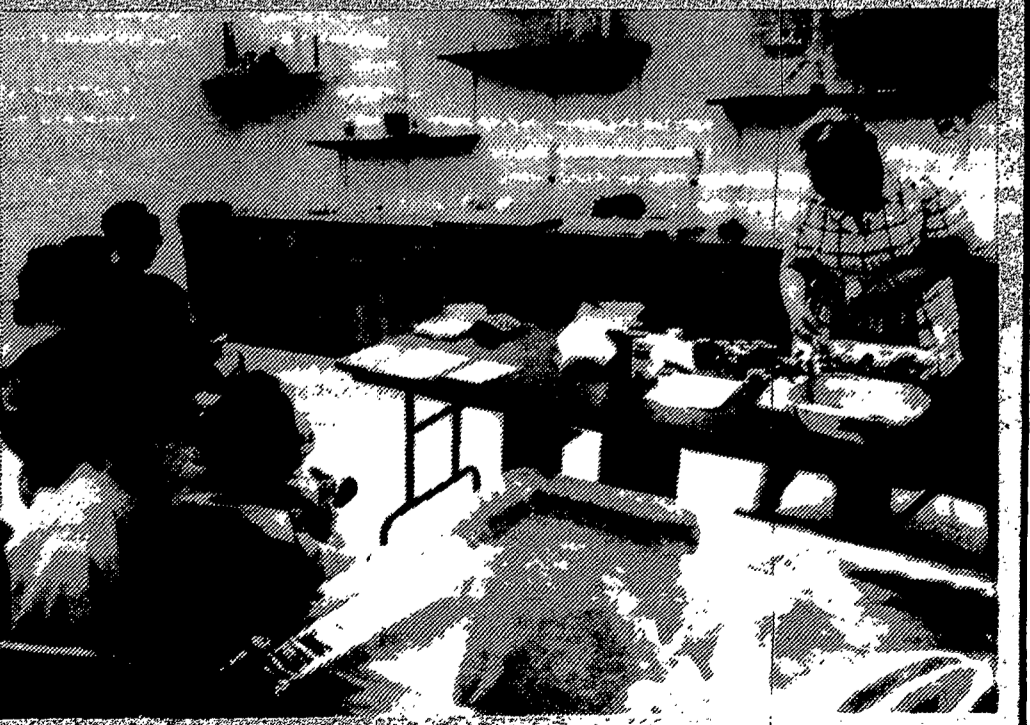


Photo by Terrence J. Brennan



Anne Marie Colavecchia takes control of a small herd of youngsters while their mothers attend a weekly meeting.



Rose Page teaches the weekly Afternoon Mother's Club how to prepare low-budget meals.

8
L
all of
the
order
While
were
grown
in the
Father
and
by
other
mean
Blanchard
referred
to
under
are a
tion
I,
S
t to the
H.R.
broad
f' con-
hat fair
nd the
to the
r. Hig-
would
s, the
'health
glaring
whole
ns un-
ill calls
tent of
United
ld help
where
omestic
rage of
yment
ould be
able to
were
ig con-
i given
ort on
merican
ay well
part of
expect
at the
force --
oblige
me to
mean
f' is a
y' and
ization
ologies
mean
re is a
black-
L' the
h that
include
g con-
igned.