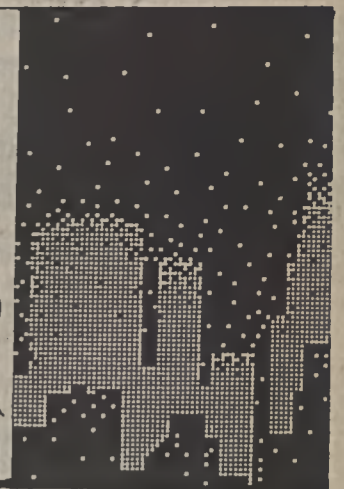




LIFESTYLES



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The Relatives

Helping Families In The Charlotte Community

By Lora Vanderhall
Post Staff Writer

"Children are the world's most valuable resource and it's best hope for the future," quoted John F. Kennedy. The youth of today are faced with problems and situations that sometimes cause them to runaway. These problems may be at home, in school or with friends but there is a place, right here in Charlotte, where children can go before they take to the streets.

The Relatives is an emergency shelter providing a safe, legal, and providing environment (1-14 days) for youth at risk under age 18. The shelter is located at 1100 East Boulevard and it is open to all youth under age 18.

In 1974 the Social Planning Council of the United Community Services formed an independent study committee to look into the problem of runaways and the community services available to them. The need for a facility for runaways was evident as a result of this survey.

The Relatives was founded in September, 1974. It is the only licensed program in Mecklenburg County where runaways, abused, neglected, and other youth in crisis have direct access to services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The employees at Relatives consist of qualified full-time and relief staff. They have been trained to handle a large range of problems. Brian Capron, Program Service Director, said the problems usually come from three categories of families. (1) Families with runaways due to physical or emotional abuse. (2) Those who are pushed out or homeless. (3) Mutual consent situations where the parent and child agree that there is a "time out" period needed. There are two professional counselors (one male, one female) on duty at all times.

The relatives offer the child in crisis a responsible alternative. Young people may come on their own, with their family or concerned others. Services are confidential and include individual and family counseling, referral and follow-up. Most clients are Mecklenburg County residents but services are available to youngsters without regard to county or state residency.

Their main objectives are: "To serve as a responsible alternative to the streets, jail or other justice system involvement, both for at risk and other young people in crisis situations. To function as an advocate for the family, viewing the crisis as signaling a family problem rather than as a problem with any one member of the family. To encourage the strengthening of family relationships and return the child to a responsible living situation."

A young person is allowed to stay at The Relatives initially for a "time out" period of 72 hours. Children are encouraged to make contact with their parents immediately but they are not forced to do this. However, they are required to have contact with their parents within 72 hours of arrival. Parents may call any time to find out if their child is in the program.

While in the program a clean house has access to hot meals, youth clothing, shower facilities, counseling service, 24 hour crisis line and a residential program. The house has nine bed spaces.

The Relatives use Reality Therapy which teaches youth and family members how to take responsibility for their own actions. The therapy is based on the belief that people have four psychological needs that they go through life striving for: love, recognition, fun, and freedom.

They have basic house rules such as no drugs, alcohol, sex or violence, doing a chore each day, attending a daily group meeting and being in by curfew. Realizing the need for greater supervision of younger children, those 13 and under are guided by slightly different rules.

Follow-up is provided for three months for all youth and families who desire it. This includes referrals to appropriate community agencies, counseling service for when a child returns home, and alternative placement when needed.

The Relatives have added a new dimension to their services called Project Safe Place. The Project is a network of trained business and community volunteers offering neighborhood sites to teens seeking help. Some of the Safe Place sites are convenience stores, fire stations and grocery stores displaying



The Relatives is a special place, with special people to help youth and their families through problems.



Stratford

the Safe Place symbol. Employees in these locations will be trained to help others in need. The Relatives intend to increase

the availability of Safe Places throughout the community so that all troubled youth may have somewhere to turn to.

Willie Stratford, Sr., co-chairman of the capital funds drive, says he became involved with the program because at an earlier age he was a runaway and he can empathize with these children. "Young people are our most important product and anything we can do to prevent them from running away, we should do. We are currently trying to raise funds to insure that this service is always available. We need your help."

The Relatives is a private, non-profit corporation. Its operating funds come from individual contributions, government grants, churches, civic groups and corporations. For the past thirteen years they have operated

out of a rented facility. Recently, they purchased the mortgage on the current site.

The Relatives emergency shelter is available to all youth under age 18, without regard to race, religion, or socioeconomic background.



Helping Young Men Reach Their Goals

Special To The Post
By Marian Wright Edelman

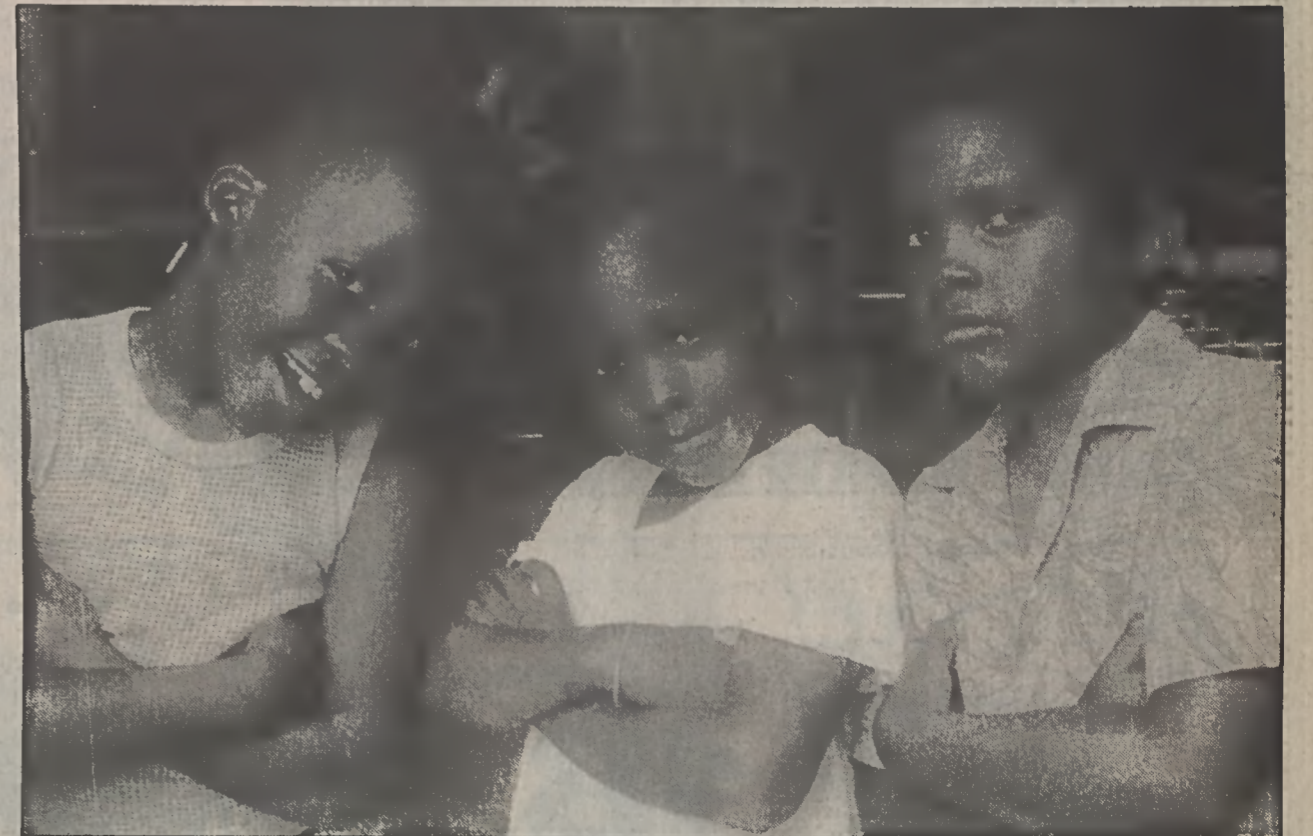
Nobody knows better than an athlete that a key to reaching a goal is to avoid obstacles.

That is why professional athletes are the linchpin of an innovative new program in Virginia schools designed to help teenage young men reach their career goals by avoiding the huge obstacles of teen parenthood. The program, called Athletes Coaching Teens (ACT I) was created by the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services.

Sports stars like former professional basketball player Bobby Dandridge and All American football player Tim Johnson have come in person to the schools to provide visible role models for the young men. The program also recruits young athletes from the student body to help their young classmates to set and achieve their goals, whether their ambitions lie in sports or in medicine or law or business.

The student leaders participate in six initial training sessions and then lead smaller workshop groups in which young men talk frankly about their responsibilities and their choices. Important issues surface, like the long term consequences of fathering a baby too young; what it can do to that scholarship, that potential job, or those college plans.

Program sponsors have found that even students who had difficulty speaking up can become



ACT I helps young men fulfill their ambitions.

more communicative in the company of peers who are comfortable talking about their lives. Programs like ACT I are not a magic answer to the problems of our male teens. But they do make several important steps in the right direction by:

- Setting a Positive Tone in Working With Teenage Males.

Too many of us have written off our teenage males as "incorrigible." But people with

first-hand experience working with teenage males disagree. We need a new approach to helping teenage young men, one that affirms their strengths.

- Involving Many Parts of the Community in Helping Teenage Young Men. Teachers at Virginia Commonwealth University helped to develop the curriculum, train and supervise leaders, and evaluate the program. The Richmond Community Services

Board builds bridges to the community and tracks down needed resources. The Richmond City Schools help identify student athletes and keep the program running.

For more information on ACT I, contact Tamara Stovall, DMHMRSAS Office of Prevention, Promotion and Library Services, P. O. box 1797, Richmond, VA 23214, 804-786-1530.



Photo By Calvin Ferguson

Venetria and Heather Davis' mother, Janice Davis, pins Martin Luther King Jr. souvenir buttons to her children's coats in preparation for their participation in the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade held in Charlotte.