

Vieth House community oriented

by Martin Dalley

Veith House is a community center for children and their families, where the aim is to develop programs in response to specific needs.

The programs concentrate on the parent-child, child-child, parent-parent, and family-community relationships. Self-awareness and a knowledge and understanding of the family — and community are key areas. "We try to provide a flexible service to people based on their needs," said Ernie Rafuse, Director of Veith House.

"This means that we don't establish one program and stick with it, as the needs of the community and the people are always changing. I think an agency, to be relevant, has to meet these needs. Our priority is to offer as good a service to as many people as possible and still remain a good service."

Veith House provides a variety of programs.

THE PLAY SCHOOL PROGRAM helps children develop in all areas of family life through a free atmosphere with the emphasis placed on the individual. Parental involvement is encouraged in every phase of the program.

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION deals with all aspects of family life including health, welfare and social well being. The program brings parents together to look at the needs of their children, their family and their community.

THE LATCH KEY (SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM) is an after school program for children aged six to thirteen, to assist them in areas of social adjustment and development. Individual needs are emphasized. Through the group process, the child explores many areas of social and emotional inter-action, becoming more aware of himself and his effect on others.

THE YOUTH AWARENESS

COURSE deals with the problems of youth in the fifteen to eighteen year age group. Personal problems, education and family problems are discussed.

THE OUT-REACH PROGRAM in conjunction with Dalhousie and Mount Saint Vincent Universities involves a tutoring program. Children who need extra help with homework are provided with a tutor. Approximately 65 students participated last year and it will hopefully be expanding this year.

THE REMEDIAL READING PROGRAM involves volunteers aiding children who have a reading disability.

THE GRAPEVINE is a monthly newsletter which deals with available services, with what is happening in the area and what people should be involved in and aware of.

The structured programs include information, referral and playing an advocate role.

"We try to look at each program as an umbrella effect, in that we don't work solely with a child, we don't isolate him. We have to involve the community and the family, which are contributing factors to anybody's behaviour," Rafuse said.

As a private agency, Veith House must rely on grants for its day to day operation. As a result, their budget is subject to change.

"Our budget has expanded quite a bit in the last year because this is an agency which is relevant. Compared with others, our budget is very small for the numbers of people we serve," Rafuse said.

LAST YEAR, VEITH HOUSE EXPERIENCED some difficulty in obtaining a federal grant. As a result, acceptance of the budget was doubtful.

"We found a way to get in and make our needs known, and we did get enough money for this



Veith House director, Ernie Rafuse, at work. (errol young/ seed)

year," Rafuse continued.

A budget for next year has been submitted asking for an increase, but Rafuse cannot anticipate what the reaction will be.

"We can't run a public campaign to solicit funds because we are under the United Appeal. However, we have a slot in our budget for donations, which are really low this year. We're worrying about how to get that up so we can meet our budget and not end up with a deficit. Money is one big problem," added Rafuse.

Another problem is lack of equipment. Although the building has a gym with some mats, there is little exercise equipment and few toys. Furniture is also scarce.

Veith House has handled a number of problems ranging from child abuse, drug problems, family, school, police and delinquency problems.

In the many cases dealing with drugs, glue sniffing has been one of the most frequent, affecting children as young as eight years old.

"This is quite serious," said Rafuse. "Some kids have been using glue for approximately two years and it is starting to affect them mentally and emotionally, if not physically."

"WE LOOK AT THE CAUSATIVE FACTORS, not so much as the enemy being glue," Rafuse continued. "Each case is an individual one. Many kids use glue because of family problems — it's a way of shutting out problems of that nature. Others use it because their friends do — to fit the peer group scene," he explained. Educating young people on the dangers of solvents and glue can only come through widespread information available to everyone, according to Rafuse.

Veith House has no strict therapeutic atmosphere. The building is old, but comfortable. Often you can't tell the people who use the place from the staff who work there.

Veith House meets a great need in that it provides a place where people can socialize and come together to work out common problems and issues. There is always someone to turn to when something goes wrong, whether it be in the home or community at large.

"As director," said Rafuse, "I feel that Veith House has gone far beyond what I or anyone expected or could have anticipated. It was a new thing for Halifax and Eastern Canada. "I think, generally, that positive feedback has come from the community with regard to its effectiveness. Taking to the children, families and everyone who uses it, I would say that Veith House has definitely been effective."

