



Photos by Kevin Higley

The boys' group home of Youth Services Systems, Inc., a local agency.



## Youth in trouble? walk in...

By Rich Tillson

The two houses stand in older neighborhoods in east and south Lincoln. They are well kept and undistinguishable from the surrounding middle-class dwellings. The quiet, ordinary appearance covers the fact that the houses, called group homes, are part of a humane system for helping youth in trouble.

At four a.m. a 14-year-old boy wanders the streets of Lincoln. Beaten and thrown out of the house by his drunken father, he walks with the darkness in depression. He is headed for a place called Freeway where they are supposed to be able to help youth in trouble. He's heard his friends talking about the place and hopes that what he heard was true. Arriving at the address he had memorized from a sticker posted on a phone booth, he sees the hand-painted sign for Freeway station and walks inside. As he stands in the doorway, the warm light and music from an all-night radio station blast away the darkness of his lonely walk. To the young man who gets up to greet him he can only say sadly, "Man—I need some help..."

These two operations, group homes (one for boys and one for girls), and Freeway Station, are parts of a unique organization known as the Youth Service System (YSS) of Lincoln and Lancaster County, Inc.

The organization helps young people ages 9 to 18, working with the schools, courts, police, and every local program or agency that deals with youth.

James Arnot, creator and director of YSS, is a greying, fatherly man who talks confidently and optimistically about his organization. YSS is a private, non-profit corporation.

"We set it up that way to avoid becoming part of the already existing juvenile system," he said. "We have a great deal more mobility in dealing with the courts and different agencies. In addition, we can divert young persons from the treadmill nature of the governmental juvenile justice complex, where the kids are bounced from the courts to the reformatories, to the streets, and back to the courts."

"We eventually want to serve all young people in the Lincoln-Lancaster area, not just the ones in trouble with the courts," Arnot added.

YSS was created in 1973 with a federal grant. Arnot had previously been connected with a small youth services program under the YMCA and he recognized the need for a separate organization. The program received much community support. The building housing the office and Freeway was donated by the county, and many Lincoln organizations, including the Home Builders Association, senior citizens homes, churches, the Lincoln Public Schools and a UNL sorority, gave time, labor, money and supplies to get it started. YSS often serves as the middleman between the courts, police, schools and the dozens of agencies dealing with youth.

"There were a lot of good services around, but they were fragmented and there was a lot of duplication of effort," Arnot said.

YSS has two services that deal directly with youth—the group homes and the Freeway Station.

"The homes have counterparts in other agencies, although they are run a bit differently," Arnot said, "but the Freeway is a unique program in the area."

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## Fowler remembers UNL

(Continued from p. 3)

The senator believes that environmental bills, which he also has actively supported, "have been the toughest to get through."

He says he has found little interest in environmental issues in Nebraska. Agricultural interests, of course, a major concern in the state, often conflict with environmental interests, he explained. But they don't conflict as much as some people believe, the senator said.

For the past two years he has tried to set up a moratorium against the construction of nuclear power plants in Nebraska. In this effort Fowler has met heavy opposition from Rural Electric, an agricultural group. But senator Fowler has also introduced a bill which would place a mandatory deposit on all beer and pop containers. Despite support from agricultural groups, this bill has had difficulty getting passed, he said.

Fowler commented on Nebraska's Unicameral, the only one-house legislature in the U.S. He said he believes it is better than a two-house system, because the legislators are more directly responsible for how they vote.

"In a two house system you can always blame the other house if a bill isn't passed," he said. Fowler said a legislator from another state told him that in that state's legislature bills are sometimes intentionally allowed to pass one house, and then are killed in the other.

Fowler has changed in four years. The senator said he has come to realize that in order to get anything done it is important to get people interested.

"I still believe you can work through the democratic process, with the support of the people," he said.

In another way Fowler hasn't changed, though. He said that some people who supported him in the last election are

disappointed that he isn't more fiery and radical in delivering his speeches. But the senator said, "I'm not comfortable being fiery."

Steve Fowler has lived in Lincoln all his life. His parents are David, a UNL music professor, and Dorothy, a teacher in the Lincoln public schools. He has three older brothers. David, who was an original member of the Bluegrass Crusade, and now is a fiddler in the Blue Eagle String Band, also teaches math at the penitentiary. His brother John is a vocational teacher at Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, and his brother Will is in charge of inventory at a warehouse.

Fowler first majored in journalism at UNL and later switched to history. He is still several hours short of graduation.

A friend of Fowler's described him as a nice guy who lives off only the \$8,000 he is paid to be a state senator, and said that his work for the Legislature leaves him no spare time.

When did Steve Fowler first become interested in politics? It seems it was the result of a junior high class project.

"We had to visit a campaign headquarters. I stayed and blew up balloons," he recalled.

It was during the 1964 campaign, and his class visited the headquarters of Clair Callan, a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. After this initial experience in politics Fowler exhibited his interest by working as a volunteer in campaigns for Phil Sorensen and the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

About the future, Fowler said he isn't interested in running for a higher political office. Some day he would like to hold a government administrative position, to be the head of some government agency. But for now he said: "I just want to serve another four years in the legislature."

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