



charging, the county attorney considers the seriousness of the offense, the youth's past record and attitude. Juveniles involved in murder, armed robbery and rape probably will be tried as adults.

Age is lower

"The age of those involved in more serious type crimes is lower than say (it was) five years ago," Hoffman said. "I can never recall a time (before five years ago) when we had a 17-year-old involved in a homicide, yet it happened two years ago."

Most juvenile offenses are not that serious and the majority never reach juvenile or adult courts. A policeman may handle the call himself, Hoffman said. For example, a first-time shoplifter will be sent home to parents. After a second time the officer will contact the youth's parents, issue a citation and refer the juvenile to the Youth Aid Bureau. Theft, particularly shoplifting, is the number one juvenile offense in Lincoln.

Hoffman: "Most of the parents are very concerned," but they don't know what to do."

Hoffman said he then interviews the youth and his or her parents and advises them of the youth's constitutional rights.

"Most of the parents are very concerned," he said, "but they don't know what to do."

He attributed troubled juveniles to the "parent's attitude of letting kids do what they want to do."

The bureau may choose to counsel a juvenile or refer the youth to the County Juvenile Court. The juvenile court may then send the youth to the Jennie B. Harrell Attention Center to await a hearing.

Modern building

The center, at 2220 S. 10th St., is a modern one-story brick building that hardly resembles the traditional picture of a detention center.

"Basically we're just a holding facility," Jon Hill, attention center director, said. "We are a last resort since we are a locked facility."

"They (police and probation officers) try to locate an open environment before they send them here."

Hill said the center provides a place where "they're none the worse for wear... knowing this is a very traumatic experience for them."

"They're scared. They don't know what to expect. we're not a typical detention center with bars and windows."

The year-old building is more the typical college dormitory than detention center. Most activity is in the main room which includes a television area, a sunken area enclosing a gas fireplace, pool table and ping pong table. The windows are curtained, not barred, and the entire building is carpeted.

Arts and crafts

There is also an arts and crafts room and an area for weight-lifting.

Off the main room are separate halls of bedrooms for males and females. The bedrooms have a window, table,

chair and bed. There is one bathroom in each wing, to be shared by about eight youths.

Juvenile counselor Carmen DeCinque said, "A lot of the kids can't handle the degree of freedom they have here." They think there must be a catch, he said.

It's not all roses for juveniles at the center. It's sometimes thorns. Incoming youths must submit to a search, then strip and shower. Hill said it is hard for the youths to maintain dignity, but it must be done.

Other thorns are the locked doors and restrictions. There are two security rooms which are stripped-down versions of the bedrooms. They are the only rooms with jail locks, are uncarpeted and generally colder. Youths are put in here to "cool off" for no longer than eight hours, DeCinque said.

There are intercoms in every room which can be used to pipe in rock music or communicate with the staff at the control desk. The control desk monitors all doors and rooms. The juveniles are locked in their rooms after midnight and after 1 a.m. on weekends.

Reality-oriented

The staff primarily consists of 10 counselors who are "reality-oriented," Hill said. Emphasis is on the here and now.

"You're here now and what happens from here is largely up to you," Hill said he tells them.

The youth probably will spend about a week at the center waiting for a juvenile court hearing or longer for an adult court trial.

Youths in juvenile court deal with Juvenile Court Judge William Nuernberger on the fourth floor of the County-City Building.

Nuernberger: "We know we're not going to change society by locking that child up with others like him."

"The answer is obvious they do not come out better persons."

"Our philosophy is we will never find the answers. Maybe we can do a little bit better job."

Informal hearings

The court hearings usually are informal, with Nuernberger dressed in street clothes instead of judicial robes. He doesn't sit on the bench but at the head of a rectangular table. Formal hearings are held upon request.

The charges are read by the county attorney, the juvenile's rights are given, the case is discussed and the judge makes a decision.

The youth is not found to be a delinquent or to be guilty, but "within the jurisdiction of and subject to the further orders of this court," Nuernberger said.

He said the term juvenile *delinquent* is not used by the law or courts in an effort to avoid tagging or labeling a person for life.

Most juveniles are put on probation. The few who are not are put in one of the following places: foster homes, Youth Development Centers at Kearney for boys and at Geneva for girls, the Regional Center, St. Joseph's Hospital in Omaha, or a group home. **3D**

Juvenile justice

By E. K. Casaccio

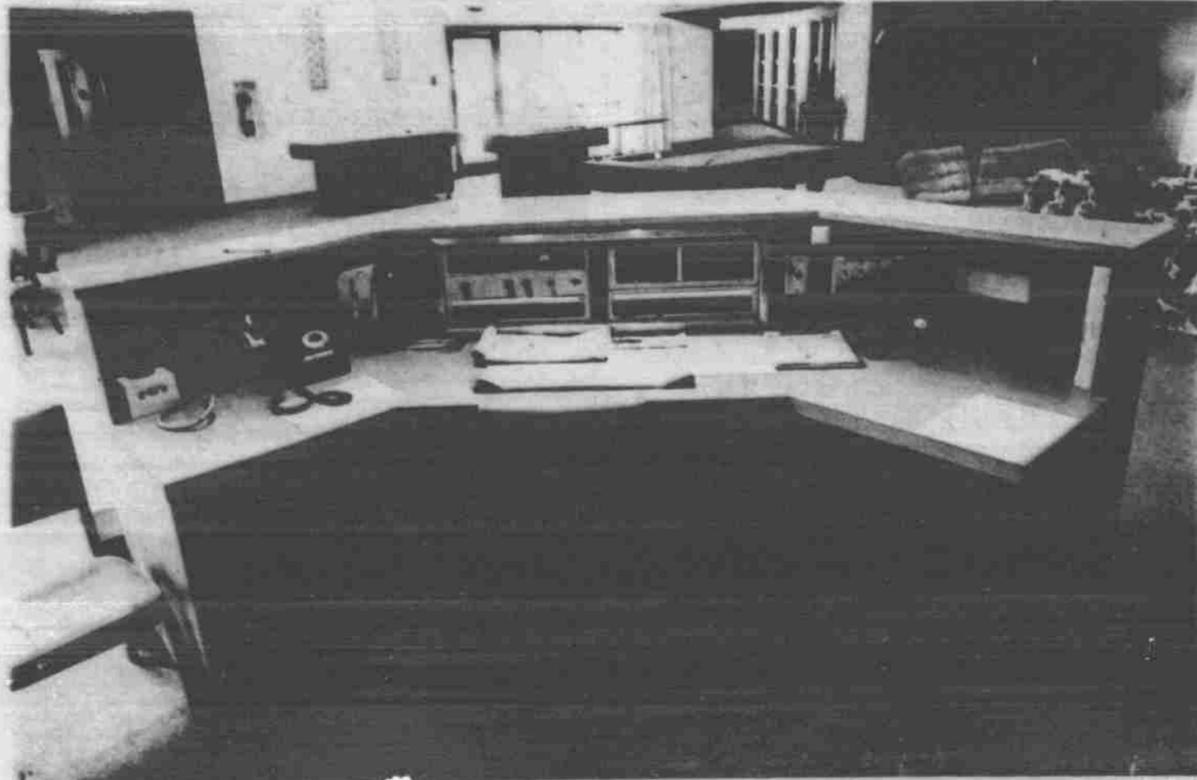
It's called an offense, not a crime. At a holding facility resembling a college dormitory, there is a week of waiting for a court hearing, not a trial. The judge, who has left the traditional black robe in the closet, rules a need for court supervision instead of a guilty verdict.

The terms may change but the problem remains — juveniles in trouble with the law.

A juvenile in Nebraska is anyone younger than 18. A person in this age group who is married or in the service can still be considered a juvenile, Lincoln Police Sgt. Gary Hoffman said.

Hoffman heads the Youth Aid Bureau of the Lincoln Police Dept. which is an intake and referral agency for youths age 15 and younger. Hoffman said he seldom deals with 16 and 17 year olds because they are handled as adults until the hearing.

The county attorney can charge any juvenile as an adult. This means the juvenile goes through the adult rather than the juvenile court system, and is subject to adult penalties including jail. Hoffman said before



Left: Harrell residents communicate from their rooms to staff through the intercom system based at the control desk. Right: Incoming juveniles are issued a new pair of tennis shoes from this supply.