



In Good Taste

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With Sheryl Popp

Nova Services Does Much for Youth and Benefits County as Well

Nova Services operates pretty much under the radar in Washington County. Although I was aware of the organization, their scope is much broader than I had realized. A non-profit, independent agency, Nova was established 28 years ago to "create a positive change in the lives of troubled youth." Their mission is to "provide leadership and service to troubled youth and their families" through various programs. The relatively small staff, considering the organization's complexity, operates out of two facilities: a home on Elm St. in West Bend has been converted to offices, and a group boys' home operates on 8th Ave.

Phil Harper is Director of the boys' home, a state-licensed facility. He relates there is no "typical" profile of a teen that lands in the group home - boys range in age from 13 to 18, and the usual stay is six months to a year. They come from rich and poor homes. They can be smart, of average intelligence or illiterate. They will be wrestling with a variety of issues that can include school problems or minor delinquencies. Overall, Nova will see more boys at about 16 1/2 to 17 years of age, often from a single parent home. Frequently, there is not a lot of parental support for these boys, and Phil says they recognize that there is something lacking in their home situation. That knowledge in turn can lead to anger. There are two pillars to Nova's program for dealing with the boys: 1) structure and 2) relationship with staff. The boys respond to having a positive adult role model, and will begin to relate, usually between two to four or five months. Various programs encourage them to be more responsible, accountable, and better able to manage their lives. Nova's goal in the past had been to return boys to their homes, but since many are now older when they arrive, 50% go on to independent living. Therefore Nova helps them to find and maintain jobs, or a job and schooling as well as learn practical daily living skills. If there was a criminal offense that incurred reparation, Nova helps them find means to make restitution, whether through a paying job or community service. Depending on each individual situation, Nova helps with not only

housing, but also with medical, dental, school placement, therapy, recreation, and more - even nutrition. Whatever they've done, it's working. Placements in the home are down, and the home is looked at by other communities as a success model.

Nova has many other components and services. Tom Bozewicz, Executive Director and Kathy Fies, Business Manager, outlined Nova's other major divisions for me. *Project Payback* helps youth make court-ordered restitution of financial means or community service work. Nova assists both the offender and their family understand the commitment and carry it out. "They keep getting younger," said Tom. "State labor laws limit the work and fine based on age. Sometimes there are behavior problems to deal with, so we have established work crews to deal with those problems." Nova searches out a variety of job programs or chores in the community, hopefully for non-profit worksites that can use the assistance. (Nova can always use more ideas for community service; please don't hesitate to call if you can help in this regard.) A group of six to eight supervised young people can perform chores like gardening, snow shoveling, helping people move, garbage collection and clean-up in parks, etc. If possible, Nova likes to place people in the community where the offense occurred. During the school year, duties are performed only on weekends. The goal is to instill accountability and eliminate future offenses.

To that end, Nova's *Restorative Justice Program* looks at victim impact and devises either a one-on-one session with offenders, victims and a counselor, or a panel of victims, offenders and their families, and advisors. The program also looks at the impact on the offender's family and establishes parents' support groups. This program is very well respected throughout the state and other communities are setting up programs based on Nova's model. Early intervention is key,



Nova Services staff L-R: Tom Bozewicz, Exec. Dir., Kris Wiedmeyer, Truancy Counselor, Cindy Maurice, Stay in School Prog. Dir., holding "John," Phil Harper, Boys' Home Dir., Kathy Fies, Business Mgr., holding "Joanne." Missing: Tina Pohl, Project Payback Dir.

and Nova presents a puppet show at local elementary schools with "John and Joanne," who stress the effects of vandalism on the community. The puppets are usually voiced by volunteer high schoolers, and on one occasion, by one of the boys currently staying at the Boy's Home. Local law enforcement partners with Nova and does a presentation after the puppet show. Nova is always looking for monies to help fund this program as well, as every area school principal in the system has opened their doors to it.

Just as vital to prevention is the *Truancy Intervention Program*. Nova works with all schools in all districts in Washington County. They meet with a truant student and his family, principal and counselors to find the root cause of the truancy. Often, it can be an easily solved, simple problem - for example a change in the family's available transportation. With habitual truants (defined by the state as five or more absences for part or all of a school day, within a semester), the root problem is often harder to diagnose. Each system has differing definitions, so even what constitutes absences is a problem. Is tardiness truancy? Nova has been known to provide wake up calls to solve truancy problems. Regardless of the degree of truancy, a plan will be formulated to address the truant behavior and Nova will then do daily checks with the schools to monitor a student's progress. A true paradox, according to Tom, is suspension. Young people aren't the only ones who think it's

strange to be barred from school for not going to school. However, this is a serious issue, as truancy can be the gateway to delinquent behavior. In recent years, truant behavior is frequently seen earlier (in middle school). Once reported, Nova programs are available at no cost to the school, the student or his family. (United Way, Dept. of Social Services and various grants carry the brunt of the cost for any Nova service.)

The Drop Out Abatement Project is another of Nova's efforts to keep kids in school. By contracting with a school district, they'll work with principals and pupil services to get a kid back into his or her school, or an alternative program or school. They take into account the needs of the individual and will try to tailor the educational program to help prepare the youth for what they can realistically expect in real world situations where they must provide for themselves. Whatever path is chosen, the Nova advisor will monitor the student's progress throughout the school year.

This has been the briefest of descriptions of all the programs and services Nova staff and volunteers seem to magically handle day in and out. From the multitudinous 24/7 duties required to administrate the boys home and meet their needs, to juggling the community service work and truancy programs, the folks at Nova are extremely proud of the work they do in the community. It's surprising to consider that the scope of their work even expands to include job training and work experience. Structured programs further assist the young people Nova helps to become even better candidates for future employment. Further, Nova is doing everything they can to increase awareness of their presence in the community and make sure that anyone who either needs their assistance or can help in some way is aware of them. Their positive approach and upbeat attitude about helping today's young peo-

ple get back on the right track is inspiring. As Kathy Fies said, "When people see our groups out working, we want them to remember that here is a group of troubled kids doing good deeds." For more complete information, go to www.novaservices.org or call 262-338-8842.

Everyone on staff at Nova supplied a recipe for us, and the top secret selection crew has opted for the following two. Enjoy!

Kathy Fies' Shrimp & Sweet Onion with Chilies and Lemon Dip
 3 Tbls. lemon juice
 1/2 Tbls. finely chopped jalapeno pepper
 1/4 tsp. ground cumin
 1/4 tsp. salt
 3 Tbls. chopped cilantro
 2 Tbls. vegetable oil
 1 1/2 lbs. cooked shrimp, cut up
 1 sliced onion
 1 sweet onion, chopped
 1 lg. ripe avocado, diced
For dressing whisk together lemon juice, jalapeno, cumin and salt. Whisk in oil. Set aside. In a saucepan, cover shrimp and sliced onion with water. Bring to a boil. Turn off heat and let shrimp stand 3 minutes. Drain, discard lemon and cool. Dice avocado. Fold into shrimp with dressing and onion. Just before serving, fold in cilantro. Serve with tortilla chips.

Cindy Maurice's Chocolate Chip Date Cake
 1 1/2 cup boiling water
 1 cup dates, cut up (8 oz. box)
 1 tsp. baking soda
 1/2 cup Crisco
 1 cup sugar
 2 eggs
 1 tsp. vanilla
 1 1/2 cup flour
 3/4 tsp. soda
 1/4 tsp. salt
Topping:
 1 cup chocolate chips
 1/2 cup sugar
 1/2 cup chopped walnuts
 Bring water to boil and remove from heat. Add dates & baking soda, set aside to cool. Cream Crisco, sugar, eggs & vanilla on low speed. Add date mixture to creamed mixture. Add dry ingredients, pour into greased & floured 9x13 pan. Sprinkle sugar, choc. chips & nuts over top of cake. Bake at 350° 35-40 minutes (glass pan 325°).