

# WINNER

## YOUTH IN NEED



by **dawne MASSEY**

Over the years, Youth in Need (YIN) has worked to keep families and at-risk children stable and show them how to strengthen their bonds. The nonprofit was founded in 1974 by a group of volunteers to assist runaway and homeless youth. Today, the organization works as a crisis safety net that assists abused or neglected children of all ages, as well as a broad range of high-risk kids who need long-term support.

"We've grown to do many other things over the years," says Jim Braun, president and CEO. "Our efforts include long-term involvement with young people who cannot be reunited with their families for whatever reason, like those who have been totally abandoned or who are aging out of the foster care system. Unless a child has absolutely no family members, we always try to involve family. Our goal is to keep them in school while developing a positive lifestyle for them and their families."

The agency has a presence in high-risk neighborhoods throughout the metro region, with staff members positioned at 30 different sites from St. Louis City to rural counties. YIN provides prevention and early intervention services, along with crisis intervention assistance and follow-up, and Braun says the agency is unique in its approach, thanks to the range of problem-solving tools that are utilized. "We don't just walk away after a crisis," he says. "We help runaways, homeless adolescents in crisis or those with family problems, and we help parents deal with kids who have behavioral problems. We offer long-term assistance for dealing with these issues, so we continue to work with families to keep things moving in a positive

direction."

He cites as example a young girl about 18 years old who was living on the streets. "She came to our shelter, where she discovered she was pregnant. We provided her with prenatal healthcare and moved her into a transitional living program until she had the baby," Braun recalls. "Typically, in a situation like this, the baby would be at a very high risk of low birth weight and other medical problems, but a healthy baby was born and we helped the young mother become self-sufficient. We got her the schooling and job training she needed, and today she is living independently with her child and supporting herself."

Because the vast majority of clients cannot afford to pay for services, funding from donors is crucial, Braun notes. The agency relies on a variety of grants from federal, state and local governments, along with contributions from area corporations, foundations and the United Way. Even at that, the organization struggles to help all who need its services.

"We are not meeting the full need," he says. "There are more young people and families out there needing help than we can provide, so we have to turn people away every day. We always have waiting lists for our counseling services, and if they're on the list and don't get services, we may never know what happens to them. Hopefully, it's nothing catastrophic and they end up getting the help they need eventually." It's a stark realization that those in crisis often have to approach several agencies before finding one that can meet their needs. "Hope is available," he concludes. ✦