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Goal is to help troubled youngsters

Father Kos plans to start temporary shelter for young people

By JERRY GRAFF
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FORTVILLE, Ind. — Rain tapped steadily at the windows of the St. Thomas Catholic Church parish hall.

It was a dreary, almost depressing February afternoon. Not fit weather for a youngster to be running away from home, yet that is what someone somewhere could be contemplating — even in Hancock County.

Inside his office at the parish hall, the Rev. Joseph Kos, pastor of St. Thomas, looked over a list of potential members for the advisory board for Host Homes, a program aimed at getting assistance for troubled youths.

In the future they will be able to get help, if Father Kos and others pushing the Host Homes program are successful. Host Homes will provide temporary shelter for young people age 7 to 17 who encounter difficulties which do not involve breaking of the law.

Hancock County Sheriff Nicholas Gulling cited the type of situation which his deputies occasionally face — a situation where a Host Home will be beneficial:

"An officer is called out on a domestic argument. The child, who has witnessed the argument, tells the officer, 'As soon as you leave I am going to leave.'"

"There is nothing legally the officer can do. Only if the child is in danger of being injured can the deputy call make use of a foster home through the welfare department.

"Under this new program, the officer can recommend a Host Home. If he can convince the parents to put the child into a Host Home it often provides a cooling off period that lets a family work things out. It gives the kids an alternative to running away," Gulling said.

Twenty-six families belonging to St. Thomas have signed up to participate in the Host Homes program, Father Kos said.

A child can be temporarily housed in a Host Home for up to 21 days. The child then must be returned to the parent or parents.

Families volunteer services. There is no reimbursement for expenses. "It is strictly out of charity for a family to volunteer its services to the program," Kos said.

"We don't ask for families in the Host Home programs to be professional counselors, just to be good listeners. The ultimate goal of the Host Homes program is to reunite children with their families of origin whenever possible.

"Host Homes is primarily a preventive program," Father Kos added.

The program calls for using a family as a Host Home just four times a year.

Kos said the next step in establishing a Host Homes program in Hancock County is formation of an advisory board.

Kos, who will be making the appointments, is seeking to find a cross-section of society, including school officials, elected office holders and others interested in this type of service.

The advisory board will then select a county coordinator who will be in charge of selecting the Host Homes.

Kos said Shirley Whitby, a substitute teacher with Mt. Vernon Schools the past five years, is one candidate for that post. She is from McCordsville and has been active in social work at St. Thomas.

The Indiana Juvenile Justice Task Force is sponsor for the Host Homes program.



The Rev. Joseph Kos