

INTRODUCTION

In 1967, Nassau County Family Court Judge Elizabeth Bass Golding was conducting a routine Family Court procedure involving the disposition of a youth adjudged to be a "Person in Need of Supervision." Although this particular case was not an unusual one, Judge Golding was struck by the voluminous record and by the child's awareness of the situation during the court proceeding. After a careful review of the case, Judge Golding learned the boy named "Johnny" had never been in trouble but was a victim of a broken family and an alcoholic mother who refused to take him home. He first came to the attention of the court in 1963 when he was eight years old. He received the gamut of placements: children's shelter, foster homes, Hillside Children's Center in Rochester, training schools and was intermittently returned to the Family Court, appearing before a different judge each time.

At the age of twelve, Johnny appeared for the first time before Judge Golding, who remanded the child to the Children's Shelter and held the case for follow-up, having directed the assigned Department of Social Services Social Worker to locate a suitable foster home for Johnny. Checking back a week later, she was appalled to learn the child had been sent to Kings Park State Mental Hospital. Further investigation disclosed the child was definitely not psychotic but was suffering from emotional problems. Judge Golding contacted the Director of the psychiatric hospital to express her disbelief that such a placement had been made without due process of law. She learned this was routine procedure. Judge Golding initiated a research survey of the youngsters placed at state psychiatric hospitals and discovered that no facilities were available for homeless, neglected, emotionally abused youth. In fact, she learned that approximately one-half of the children in the state psychiatric hospital system were unjustly deprived of their freedom simply due to a lack of suitable facilities. She decided this massive social abandonment must not continue, and became determined to find a way to provide a responsible alternative to state hospitalization.

In June 1968, Judge Golding convened a Committee for "lost children" to find alternatives for this injustice. After a series of meetings in Judge Golding's chambers, the Committee decided the most effective way to attack this problem was to acquire single family homes in residential communities to nurture youth who were not in need of hospitalization. The Committee members were determined to provide normal homes for emotionally abused, neglected, abandoned and homeless children who did not require hospitalization.

The members of the Committee for Lost Children encountered many stumbling blocks, not the least of which were the lack of legislative mandate and funding. Intensive work resulted in the passage of the Youth Hostels Act by the New York State Legislature in 1969. This Act amended Article 1.03, Section 3, of the New York State Mental Hygiene Law, to be all inclusive, the amendment described children as "Mentally Disabled." During the same year, the Mental Hygiene Law was amended to provide budget appropriations for group homes. Hope for Youth, Inc., a not-for-profit voluntary child care agency, was founded and incorporated in 1969.