

# Open doors, open arms

Outside In welcomes queer and questioning youth to a new home

by Timothy Krause

Photos by Marty Davis

**T**ucked away in the back of a small, old Victorian home was Kathy Oliver's office. Up the creaky stairs, down a narrow corridor, past the copier and behind the file boxes. The path to its executive director's desk illustrated where Outside In was—literally and figuratively—until last month, when the agency serving Portland's homeless youth finally became a homeowner.

Outside In had been housed primarily in two near-dilapidated turn-of-the-century homes on the edge of downtown Portland. The space was cramped and uncomfortable. The buildings were in disrepair and inefficient. And the agency's landlord, First Unitarian Church, wanted to demolish the buildings

and expand into the space.

Last October, Outside In broke ground on a new \$5 million building—just down the block but in many aspects worlds away from where it was. Now, with about 27,500 square feet, the four-story structure gives Outside In more than a little elbowroom.

"All of Outside In's services will, for the first time, be offered at one site," explains Oliver with a sense of satisfaction. "This one-stop service site for homeless youth will provide not only housing but a state-of-the-art medical clinic, case management, an employment resource center, day program and both alcohol/drug and HIV prevention services. Programs in this facility will offer sound, long-term solutions for Portland's homeless youth."



Kathy Oliver

Located on 13th Avenue facing Interstate 405, the building's courtyard displays original artwork by Outside In clients and Portland artists, including a vibrant and colorful see-through mural across the front exterior of the building. The utilitarian

structure creates a raw, urban dynamic that is reflected indoors as well. For example, the lobby is both functional and welcoming, while the colorful, offbeat tile floors convey a

message that this is not a conventional clinic or social service agency.

To some, the move might be no more than a change of address, but to Oliver, her staff and their clients, it brings a sense of pride and accomplishment.

"It's an incredible identity shift," observes Ann Hinds, manager of Outside In's risk education department. "For me, the building means that the people of the city of Portland are showing respect for the clients we serve by providing for them in the best way possible.

What it means for the clients is the idea that people care about them and care about their lives."

## Outside In, inside out

**O**n the second floor of the new facility, an open room with large windows provides generous space for group activities. Adjacent is a commercial-grade kitchen offering clients breakfast and lunch, so hunger is not a barrier to participation. Elsewhere, kids log on to computers, participate in health education workshops, join a bicycle repair program or take part in sports and arts activities.

Outside In describes it as a safe environment where kids—some traumatized and most distrustful—begin to build support-

ive relationships with adults. Last year, the organization's day program supported about 500 youth in their transition away from living on the street.

For Outside In's eight service coordinators, most handling 15 clients each, the integration of all programs under one roof will make it easier for them to connect kids with services, such as crisis counseling, as well as basic resources, including use of a phone, a mailing address, bus tickets and vouchers for food, clothing and haircuts.

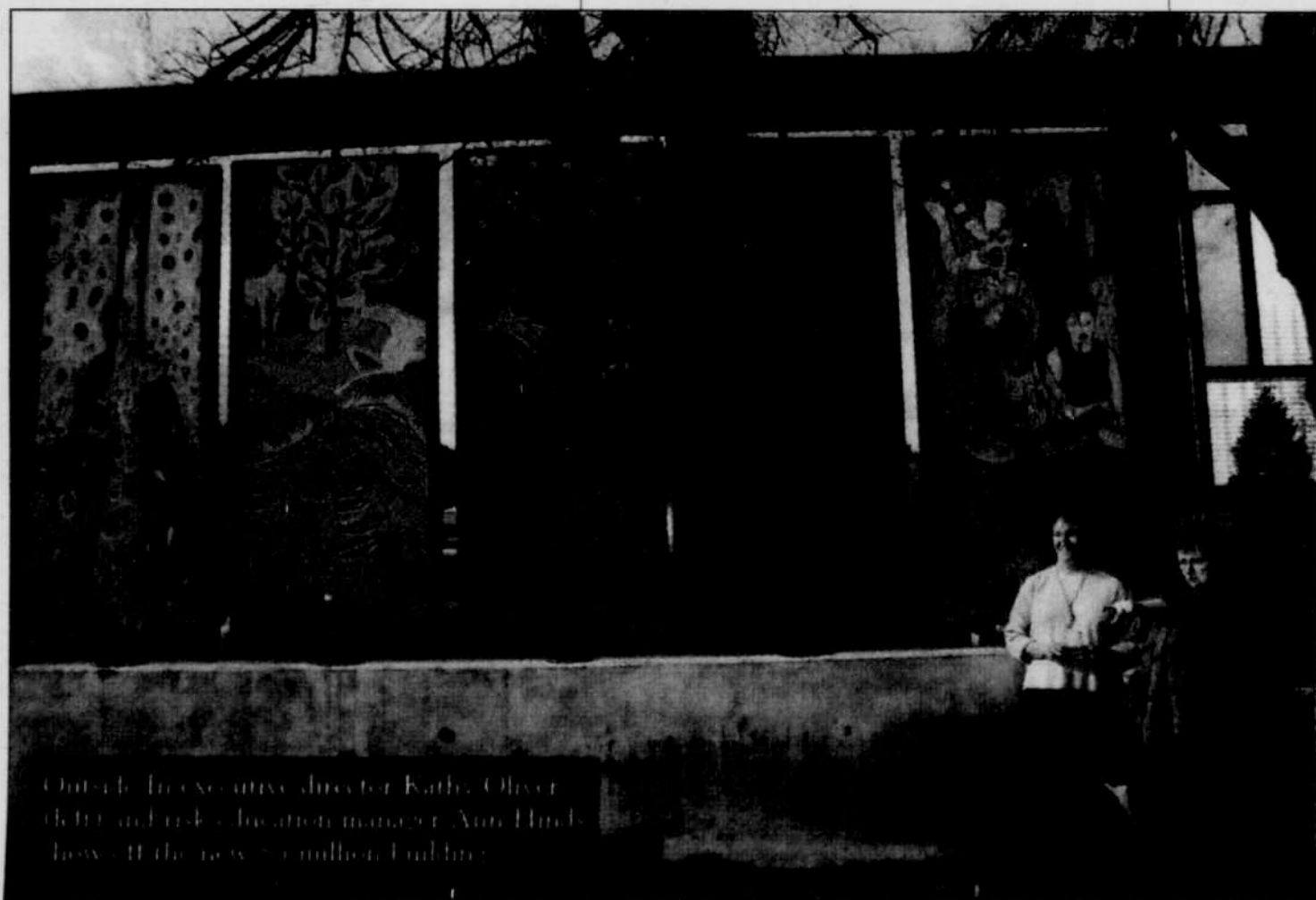
Together with the staff members, youth develop personalized plans for bettering their lives. In fact, before kids are accepted into the program, they demonstrate their commitment by undergoing an intake service assessment.

And before receiving housing assistance, they must be participating in education or employment goals.

"Most of them choose employment because they want money," Oliver notes, "but I wish more of them would choose education because I

think that gives them the best shot." Such goals often mean working toward a general education diploma but also can include applying to colleges and securing financial aid.

Outside In's employment resource center now is located in the basement of the new building, a sizable room with a clever design allowing light from outside to enter the subterranean



Outside In executive director Kathy Oliver (left) and risk education manager Ann Hinds (right) stand in front of the new \$5 million building.

