

A TRIP INTO... OZONE HOUSE

The year is 1969. A young man walks toward an old, large house. He wears jeans, a T-shirt, and an expression of apprehension. He reaches the door, opens it and walks up a long dark stairway lined with young people. He notices as he passes that most are wearing beads, peace sign jewelry, and long hair, like himself. Some are smoking cigarettes, exhaling clouds that hang around the few lights that exist in the hallway. As he passes, the acid scent of sweat tells him some of these teenagers haven't bathed in a while. Is this the Ozone House? "He asks a young woman sitting on the lowest step. "Yep, upstairs. " He walks to the top of the stairs, where another young woman, also dressed similar to himself greets him, and asks him how he is doing. Would he like anything to eat? Does he need a shower? How is he feeling? After days of feeling lost and confused, the boy starts to relax and talk about his long journey.

In the late sixties and early seventies young people flocked to Ann Arbor to experience the counter-culture movement. They came from all over the country to protest the war, to experiment with drugs, and to avoid problems at home.

Ozone House was created in the basement of Cantebury House, a meeting place for leftwing political and religious organizations in Ann Arbor. It was there that several community members began to discuss their concerns about the number of runaway youth living in the streets of Ann Arbor. They felt that a safe haven needed to be established—a place where runaways could “crash” and avoid the hassles and the uncertainty of street life.

Quakers and members of the Rainbow People's Party were among the original founders of Ozone House. Their philosophies had tremendous impact on the design form and function of the agency. The Rainbow People's Party brought with them the ideas of non-hierarchy and the importance of volunteerism, and the Quakers stressed the practice of collectivism and consensus

decision-making. These philosophies merged, and Ozone House (named after a song by a local band called **Lost in the Ozone Again**) was born.

Ozone's services were designed to be nonjudgmental and sympathetic to a youth's need for self-determination. Our practices served as an **alternative** to traditional social welfare agencies whose bureaucratic and often authoritarian style repelled young people. Ozone House was set up to find creative solutions to the runaway problem—from the runaway's point of view.

For these reasons, Ozone House was immediately disliked by more conservative community members. Young, long-haired counselors were accused of breaking up homes, being anti-family, and brainwashing young people with Marxist, Maoist, and pacifist ideas. Police raids were not uncommon, and there was a sign on the wall at Ozone House warning workers that the phones could be tapped. Despite judicial and police disapproval, Ozone House received financial backing from the City of Ann Arbor in 1972.

Part of Ozone's mission was, and still is, to serve as an advocate for youth and youth rights. Runaways were once considered delinquents, and were subject to police pickup and detention. Neither counseling nor family intervention was made available. As one of the original creators and members of what is now the Michigan Network for Youth and Families, Ozone House was a leader in the movement to expand the legal rights of youth, and to decriminalize status offenses.

Counseling, meals, and “crash” beds were other services provided by Ozone House. These services were paraprofessional in nature, provided by non-degreed volunteers who were often the same age as the youth. Paid staff were added slowly to the agency and college degrees were not a requirement for employment until the nineties.

In 1974, Ozone House was chosen by the National Institute of Mental Health to run a project “demonstrating new and unique services to runaway youth” and was one of the original grantees of what was then the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This funding allowed us to expand services to include 24-hour crisis intervention, family counseling, and a state licensed foster care program.

The unique philosophies of Ozone House not only impacted service delivery, but shaped administrative policy and practice. All meetings were run by consensus decision-making; no votes were cast, no majorities reached. The

agency had no Director, or “boss” of any kind. Authority and responsibility was shared by all members of the agency—volunteers as well as staff. Working in a non-hierarchical structure, it was believed, could help people learn how to find their own solutions to problems and provided a strong sense of empowerment. In fact, their enthusiasm and hope in this model led Ozoners to believe that we would put ourselves out of business one day.

Unfortunately this did not happen. Instead the need for places like Ozone House only increased as the problems of young people and their families became much more serious and complex. The reasons motivating youth to run away shifted from adventure-seeking, to a need to escape family violence and instability. The number of homeless youth, and the severity of their problems multiplied. The phenomenon of throw-aways (kids thrown out by parents no longer willing or able to care for them) became more common.

These challenges demanded new and expanded services. Today we offer a full continuum of prevention and intervention services for runaway and homeless youth, and their families, including: youth shelter; non-residential counseling services for youth and their families; 24 hour crisis intervention; case management and life skills training; a transitional living program; independent living assistance; a street outreach program and Ypsi-lanti Drop-in Center; and several support groups.

Over the years, the needs of youth and families have changed dramatically. To be effective and responsive, Ozone House has had to reevaluate many of the philosophies that created and guided us for so many years. No longer a collective, Ozone House has gone through a rebirth in the last decade that has allowed us to greatly expand our administrative capacity and our skills as youth and family workers. These changes have been critical to helping Ozone House continue to thrive and meet the challenges faced by youth and families in the 90's. Despite our transformation, Ozone House has remained committed to the values that have made us invaluable to so many young people over the years—providing flexible, youth-centered, and non-judgmental services to those who need us.

-Compiled by
Tanya Hildendorf, MSW
Executive Director of Ozone House

Free & Confidential Support Groups for Teens

Because many youth work out their problems best with peers, Ozone House offers youth support groups to complement other services. Facilitated by Ozone's counseling staff, the groups are free, confidential, voluntary, and open to all. Snacks and bus tokens are available at meetings. For information or referrals, call (734)662-2222.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning Teens 2nd & 4th Mondays at 6:30pm

For young people who are looking for other teens who they can identify with, who have the same issues about growing up gay. An open discussion group with occasional activities.

Young Women's Relationships Group Tuesdays at 6:30pm

For teenagers who are committed to staying clean and sober. The group gives teens a safe place to talk about the struggles of trying to stay sober while living in a world where alcohol and drugs are everywhere. Youth give each other support while navigating adolescence, and get substance abuse information from the facilitator.

Children of Alcoholics/Substance Abusers Thursdays at 4:30pm.

For young people ages 13 to 17 who have substance abusing parents, who want help coping (whether they live at home or not), and who want support from peers dealing with the same challenges.



Street Outreach Coordinator- Chris Mack, Volunteer Coordinator- Will Osler, and Ozone Board member- Armethia Sims at the Drop-in Center Grand Opening.

New Drop-in Center in Ypsilanti!

Ozone House has opened a new Drop-in Center as part of a federally funded Street Outreach Project that seeks to reach and

serve more homeless and at-risk young people—particularly those in the Ypsilanti and Willow Run area (including Ypsilanti and Superior Township). The Drop-in Center is located at 30 North Huron in Ypsi and is open to all youth who walk in, even if they haven't come for services.

Services offered include

- Crisis intervention & referrals.
- Transportation to Ozone House Shelter.
- Emergency meals in self-serve kitchen.
- Shower for homeless youth & hygiene supplies.
- Intakes on-site one day/week.
- Counseling & case management for clients, by appointment.
- Structured educational and recreational activities.
- Support from adult staff and Peer Outreach Workers
- STYLUS educational program during the day; tutoring 4-5pm.
- Community resource area, info about other agencies, programs for youth.
- Employment and apartment search assistance (job & message board, newspaper, internet access)
- Support and Education Groups.

As part of the Street Outreach Project, teams of an adult Street Outreach Coordinator and 2 youth Peer Outreach do outreach shifts Tuesday through Friday from 4 to 6pm. Ypsilanti areas, Willow Run, West Willow, and key areas in Ann Arbor are focused on by the teams. Stops include streets, parks, malls, parking lots, part stores, arcades, community/rec centers, and youth-serving agencies. Outreach goals involve approaching youth, explaining Ozone House Services, distributing Help Cards, HIV/AIDS prevention materials, educational pamphlets, and hygiene kits. In a longer conversation, workers assess youth's needs, provide crisis intervention and make appropriate referrals. Outreach workers can be identified by either an Ozone House Street Outreach sweatshirt, jacket or baseball cap.

Youth Education & Leadership Committee

A core group of 5 young people currently serve on Ozone's Youth Education & Leadership Committee. Co-chairs of the group also sit on the Ozone House Board of Directors. The founding goals of the committee were to help evaluate agency programs from a youth/client perspective; design and implement youth outreach programs; and organize youth-oriented events and fundraisers.

Group members are very in touch with the real-life issues of Ozone House clients. They've met clients, or have received or are receiving Ozone House services themselves. The group is currently working on a project they initiated to advocate for youth in foster care. The idea came from the members' goals

The Ozone Shelter

While Ozone House has contributed to the process of finding youth safe shelter in foster care or temporary housing since its inception in 1969, an on-site shelter was realized in 1997. Ozone Shelter is the first and only youth shelter in Washtenaw County. Since it's opening, the 2-bedroom residence on the 2nd floor of the Ozone House has served as safe housing for hundreds of young people. Youth can receive counseling while on-site, as well as family counseling for up to three months after a shelter stay. Unlike Ozone's counseling services, parental permission is required for a shelter stay for youth under 18.

Ozone Drop-in Center:
30 North Huron
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Phone: 734-485-2222

Ozone House Main Location:
1705 Washtenaw Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104.
Business calls: 734-662-2265

Crisis line: 734-662-2222 24hrs/day

Ozone's 30th Anniversary

August marks 30 years since Ozone House's opening.

Three events will be held to commemorate this anniversary:

The Ozone Ball at Cobblestone Farm
Friday, August 27th from 7 to 11pm.

Join in a festive summer evening of dancing, great food, fun and memories. Dance to the best tunes of the '60s and '70s—Motown, disco, and the Beatles. The Ball will also feature a Silent Auction, door prizes, and a brief ceremony honoring our founders. Tickets are \$30 per person, a partly tax-deductible donation.

30th Anniversary Reunion Weekend
Friday, August 27th through August 29th

Festivities for former staff and volunteers include reunion dinner, breakfast reception at Ozone House, and other activities. Check website for details: www.adeptsys.com/ozone

Fashion for Food at the Nectarine Ballroom
Sunday, August 1st at 9pm

The Second Annual benefit for Ozone House showcases music and fashion. \$5cover