

Guy Shilts, Jr. '71, '72

It was 1972 and the nation was in the midst of a recession. For Guy Shilts, Jr. '71, '72 and good friend Bob Long, both recent graduates of UW-Whitewater's master's degree program in counseling, jobs were few and far between. While waiting for the economy to improve, Shilts took an internship at a counseling center to gain experience. A year later, together with Long and UW-Whitewater Professor Richard Wagner, the three decided to take destiny into their hands, opening the CrossRoads Counseling Center in Janesville.

How exactly does a counseling center in a storefront on Main Street become the accomplished outpatient mental health clinic it is today? The answer is seemingly simple: "By fulfilling the needs of the community," said Shilts, CEO and a licensed psychotherapist, "and because we didn't think we could fail." Over the years, CrossRoads has grown from an initial staff of three providing 250 hours of therapy in the first year, to a staff of 35 providing over 32,000 hours of therapy annually.

Over the last three decades, CrossRoads has experienced a lot of firsts: it was the first treatment group home in the state of Wisconsin for delinquents; it co-founded the first task force to address the needs of at-risk children; it was the first to integrate alcohol and other drug addiction (AODA) and mental health treatment; and it created the first group home for girls, as well as the first group home for children coming out of a



correctional facility. And during those 32 years, Shilts' goal has always remained the same: to help patients achieve a more effective way of living outside of a mental health facility.

"At CrossRoads we've trailblazed a lot of new ways of keeping people out of the hospital," Shilts said. "We've done that by working with community agencies, developing employee assistance programs and working with schools."

Two such programs that have experienced amazing success since being introduced a mere three years ago include CrossRoads' child and adolescent day treatment programs. Both programs provide additional intensive counseling in a structured setting beyond what is provided in weekly outpatient visits. "Day treatment is ideal for those children and adolescents being discharged from an inpatient facility or residential program," Shilts said. "It provides critical transitional support, significantly reducing the occurrences of re-hospitalization."

Shilts' creativity also extends beyond treatment programs. "Most therapists are good at being therapists, but not always so good at managing the books," Shilts said laughingly. "With the help of my son, Jordan, and a skilled team, I've been able to develop a software program that literally tells therapists what to do when, like when to get insurance authorizations and when to make a diagnosis." The program is in its final stages of development and Shilts hopes to have it ready for implementation and sale by early 2006.

Shilts' innovation is also hard at work on the UW-Whitewater campus. He recently started an internship program with the university's counselor education program to provide graduate students with valuable hands-on clinical experience. Shilts has also been asked to serve as an adjunct professor for the university's counselor education master's degree program.

"The process to become a certified therapist takes about seven-and-a-half years and requires 3,000 hours of outside clinical experience," Shilts said. "It's a tremendous investment of time. This partnership will help students earn some of those hours while at the same time having the opportunity to observe and work directly with therapists."

For Shilts, starting this internship with the College of Education is his way of giving back to the university. "Whitewater was a turning point for me," he said. "I wasn't very good academically, but once I got into the counseling program I succeeded and knew that counseling was what I really wanted to do."

Shilts lives in Madison with his wife Beverly. They have three children: Guy "Will" III, Jordan (both students at UW-Whitewater) and Megan. He is currently working on his first book, "Guy'd Lines," a practical book about life based on the wisdom gained through his patients, which is due out in spring 2006.

—Melissa DiMotto