By weaving safety nets of services for people in trouble, Moe Boisvert ’66 and the nonprofit agency he leads have changed the trajectory of thousands of lives that were spiraling downward. Now in his 30th year as president and CEO of Worcester-based Youth Opportunities Upheld, Inc. (YOU, Inc.), Boisvert credits his family, his faith, his colleagues and his Assumption education with his success both in life and in his life’s work. This year, he celebrates the 40th anniversary of the nonprofit child welfare agency that hired him 40 years ago as its first fulltime employee and founding director.

YOU, Inc. was established in Worcester in 1971 as an alternative to institutionalizing young offenders, many of whom were guilty of little more than truancy. No stranger to youthful scrapes himself, Boisvert remembers his mother, rosary beads in hand, arriving at Assumption Prep, where she would pray that her young “hellion” would be reinstated. Given his own childhood escapades, Boisvert easily understood the population he hoped to serve. He also knew from experience how important it was to a young person in trouble to have the support of family and home. Years later he developed a vision and a plan for a community-based program to keep young people in trouble in their neighborhoods rather than send them to juvenile hall.

“Our first YOU, Inc. program was funded through a very small grant from the federal government,” Boisvert said. “Our research allowed us to show with solid data that we had a positive impact on kids. We wanted to keep them in their own families, in their own schools and in their own communities. That success led to a volunteer program. At that time, kids were being sent to detention while waiting for hearings, so we created a foster home program and started a shelter for kids.”

YOU, Inc., served more than 21,000 children and families at risk last year. With an annual budget of $30 million and 600 employees, the nonprofit organization operates programs at 32 locations in Worcester County to offer school-based, community-based and residential services. The agency’s residential programs alone house 150 children on average. More than 500 children attend YOU, Inc.’s school programs; its mental health clinics count more than 700 patient visits each year. Keeping his fingers on the pulse of the Central Mass community has been vital to the growth, services and effectiveness of YOU, Inc., Boisvert said.

“In the Business

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—Maurice “Moe” Boisvert ’66
For more than four decades Maurice “Moe” Boisvert ’66 has worked strategically and passionately to provide second chances to thousands of young people and others at risk.
“I learned early on from another Assumption graduate, Claude Dufault ’52, that agencies don’t have needs; communities have needs,” he said. “You have to listen to the community. My 40 years with YOU, Inc., truly has been an unbelievable professional journey, and a gratifying and rewarding experience. But I actually started my career in child welfare as a teenager at Assumption Prep. I volunteered at a school for boys and was very active in the Worcester Boys & Girls Club. I continued in college where that tradition of community volunteerism at Assumption and at the other area colleges has created a wonderful legacy.”

Few people have the opportunity to grow and shape an agency from its earliest days, as Boisvert has. Both the man and the organization have expanded their horizons, held tight to their core values and transformed thousands of lives. After decades of service to others, both remain relevant, responsive and resilient – and true to his strategic vision to remain on the cutting edge of best practice. Over the years he has developed his own habits of success, which include writing thank-you notes first thing every morning to reach out and connect to people and organizations that benefit from or support YOU, Inc.

“My professional journey has changed every five years,” he said. “First I was a clinician, then I became a program director and we became an agency. The agency grew every five years, so the job never stayed the same. I have a board member now who I have known since he was 15 years old and a client. Now he’s my boss. I have a very supportive board of mentors.”

A respected leader both in his field and within his own organization, Boisvert is known as an effective manager and consummate social worker. A local business leader observed, “Some people have more energy and electricity than others and that’s Moe.” He has anticipated the needs of YOU, Inc.’s client populations in the changing social services landscape, while preserving YOU, Inc.’s core value, “children and families first.” This mantra is ingrained in the organization’s corporate culture, and animates the important work YOU, Inc. embraces on behalf of young people and families in crisis.

As a community activist, Moe has worked to create and nurture partnerships across the spectrum of nonprofit agencies, school districts, health care providers, and businesses and government entities. He crosses agency and service lines to identify and address the root causes of illness, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse and social policies, among other factors, that contribute to dysfunction, disruption and loss in the lives of children and families.

In addition to his work with YOU, Inc., Boisvert has taught at Assumption, Clark University and Quinsigamond Community College. Currently, he’s teaching in the graduate school at Boston College. A licensed clinician, he has earned two master’s degrees, one in clinical psychology from Assumption and another in social work from the University of Connecticut. Equal parts clear-eyed executive and committed social worker, he has important lessons to share from the helm of the lean, effective, caring organization he built. One of his biggest challenges was learning to manage the nonprofit agency as a business.

“Learning to manage the business was really an on-the-job training experience,” Boisvert said. “I went back to school to take classes in accounting and management and other business subjects. My Assumption education contributed to all the things that I have learned over the past 40 years. We learned important study habits – how to read with retention, organize our time, and be task- and goal-oriented. Now people write about the habits of success in management books. We learned at Assumption that you need to create a vision for where you’re going if you ever expect to get there.”

Boisvert’s experiences demonstrate that even children who have been traumatized are resilient – and that there is no such thing as a “throw-away kid.” He also understands that a successful organization is built by the team of people who work in it. For him, success is about the team producing the best results by getting the best ideas from each individual.
While his work can be all-consuming, living a balanced life is important to Boisvert.

You have to maintain a balance between work and family life," he said. "At the end of the day you’re going to be home with your family. I have been blessed with the support of my wonderful family. Pam and I have been married 42 years. We have four daughters, eight grandchildren and another on the way in September. Most important, we must remember that we don’t take a breath without God’s permission. Our faith guides our core values. A critical tenet is to treat others as we would want to be treated every day and to bring love to everything we do. We need to remember that huge success is simply divine intervention."

Boisvert’s commitment to finding new options for children and families in trouble has brought him recognition from all quarters. He received the Assumption College Alumni Association’s Fr. Louis Dion, A.A. ’35 Outstanding Achievement Award in 2001; the 2003 Heroes Among Us Award from the Boston Globe and Boston Celtics; the Worcester Business Journal’s Business Leader of the Year Award in 2006 and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation’s 2008 Renaissance Award, among others. He finds new adventures by staying close to the College and to the Assumptionists.

“The Assumptionists have a very global reach," he said. “Pam and I support tuition for 60 children in the Congo so they can attend school. I was in Butembo in 2007 where the Assumptionists have established a college. I go to Africa once a year where I’m helping to start a school and I hope to help to build a child welfare agency. When you go to Africa, you see the stark contrast between want and need.”

Boisvert continues to challenge himself outside of the work day. For each decade birthday, he has set and met an ambitious personal goal. When he turned 40, he ran his first Boston Marathon; at 50 he rowed in the Head of the Charles competition, and at 60 he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro with one of his daughters. Looking ahead to his 70th birthday, Boisvert is considering taking a bike trip across the United States, if his knees cooperate.

Today, YOU, Inc., serves more than 21,000 children and families at risk each year. With an annual budget of $30 million and 600 employees, the nonprofit organization operates programs at 32 locations in Worcester County.

Passing on proper bowtie technique to a new generation