

AT YOUR SERVICE: AUDREY BYRD

Hometown: Highland

Employment: classroom teacher, Crisis Center emergency shelter, 101 N. Montgomery Ave., Gary

How long have you held that position? six years.

What are your responsibilities? "I teach students from all grade levels (seventh through 12th) in one classroom. They are here for various reasons — some are runaways and others come from difficult home situations — but they all are here to learn. I have to adjust to the fact that I never know how long, or when, certain students will be in my classroom."

What did you do before working at the Crisis Center? "I retired from the Gary school system in 1999, after 38 years of service. I taught both junior high and high school. I also served as an adjunct professor at Indiana University Northwest after retirement."

Why did you choose to work at the Crisis Center? "A friend told me that they needed certified teachers in order to receive Title I funds for classroom students. I had many years teaching experience and thought I could make a difference."

What is the most challenging part of your job? "To be flexible. I have to write my own curriculum and fine-tune it every day. Since there are different grades and different learning levels involved, it definitely takes a seasoned teacher to do this. You have to be creative. When I began, I was hesitant, since I'd never done this job before, but now I'm glad I tackled it."

How do you adapt to those challenges? "For instance, I like to use novels in the classroom. I will play a CD of the book while the students are reading. That way, the ones who are reading at a different level aren't so obvious. Another time, I had a tea party for the girls, to teach them manners. The boys served as the hosts, and everyone had a great time."

What's the most enjoyable part of your job? "When you get the feeling that a student feels you care. They may not necessarily have had this feeling



Audrey Byrd applies her experience from 38 years in Gary schools in her current job as a teacher at the Crisis Center in Gary. "The students touch my heart," she says. — PHOTO PROVIDED

at home."

How would you compare your job today to when you began your career in the 1960s? "Technology is just a portion of education. I believe in the hands-on, face-to-face instruction with a teacher, that human touch."

What's the biggest drawback to your job? "The students touch my heart. I want to take all of them home with me, but can't."

What other organizations are you involved in? "I serve on the board of directors of the Steel City Hall of Fame. I also work with many other organizations in the community."

— Compiled by Sue Ellen Ross,
Post-Tribune correspondent