

First-Hand Experience Leads Board Member To Fight Drugs

By POLLY WARREN
Staff Writer

"I was angry, upset. I felt betrayed as a parent that he had not listened to the upbringing I tried to teach him ... We are what is considered a good family — church, PTA, Girl Scouts, Little League — involved with our children."

But more than two years ago, Cobb County Board of Education member Carolyn Duncan discovered her bright, athletic, "all-American" redhead was smoking pot, drinking and dabbling in other drugs.

At first she felt guilty, but now realizes, "I hadn't done anything wrong. It was his decision, not mine."

The decision for the Duncans' 17-year-old son to enroll in the St. Petersburg, Fla., STRAIGHT program was not the boy's. In fact, he was told the family was going on vacation.

But after 17 months in the program, he is back in school "looking 1,000 percent better" and with a positive self-image.

And his mother is determined to shed light on this problem stretching to all families. Knowing the emotional

havoc drug abuse created within her own family, Mrs. Duncan is the impetus behind the Cobb County Board of Education's decision to get further involved in the fight against drugs.

On Monday, Nov. 16 at 9 a.m. in the Cobb County transportation facility on South Cobb Drive, the board is hosting a one-day seminar on combating substance abuse in the schools.

The purpose of the seminar is to discover what various agencies are already doing within the community

See DRUG SEMINAR, Page 6A

Drug Seminar Set

Continued From Page 1A

and to work toward a concentrated effort. School system officials also hope to draw some conclusions about their role.

Mrs. Duncan is aiming for the formation of a task force to gain legislation stemming the use of illegal drugs and a "good Samaritan act" to protect teachers from liability when attempting to identify students using drugs to their parents.

She also foresees efforts to inform the public about dangers associated with the use of drugs, support for rehabilitation and law enforcement efforts, and action as an advisory panel to the school board.

Mrs. Duncan said when she first discovered her son was using drugs, the family had a conference, talking three hours.

"I thought I had gotten through to him. He understood the evils and would never do it again," she said.

She also thought she was informed about drugs — "I read all the Reader's Digest articles" — but both concepts were shattered when she once again found her son using drugs. She then started research into the drug culture.

"The problem with drug use is that so many of the symptoms are interwoven with typical teenage behavior," she explained. And unless parents have some awareness they can miss the warning signals.

For example, she cited some of the signals: fluctuating grades, withdrawing from the family, rapid mood swings, wrecks, habitual lateness, untidy appearance, lying, shortages of money around the house, an abundance of eye-clearing medicine bottles around the house, and loss of weight.

Children, especially those in the vulnerable teenage years, take drugs primarily from peer pressure and secondly due to a low self-esteem, she says.

Teenagers think starting pot and alcohol means "immediate acceptance." They take it to feel good after flunking a test or fighting with their



CAROLYN DUNCAN
Heading Drug Abuse Fight

parents or friends, she said.

Drug users "don't learn to cope with their feelings. They feel artificially. They don't understand pain is a part of growing up," Mrs. Duncan said.

Inmaturity is reflected in their approach to drugs. "Children don't drink to relax. They drink to get drunk. They want to feel that mood swing." But efforts to achieve more and varying mood swings can lead to their death, the concerned mother said. It's Russian Roulette to take combinations of marijuana, alcohol, speed and methaqualone as some are doing, she added.

"My best advice to parents is to be open to the possibility it can happen to your family. Look at your child with an objective eye. Be as good a parent as you can, be honest and get your child to talk to you honestly.

"There is no sure-fire formula. There is nothing you can take," she said regretfully.

But awareness can be the key and to that end she hopes Monday's seminar is the first step.