

No More Drugs

Former Users Go STRAIGHT

By POLLY WARREN
Staff Writer

Pam is 17. For over three years, she used pot, hash, uppers, downers, acid, cocaine, LSD and speed, among other drugs.

She first experienced drugs with a friend in the sixth grade. That was at a time when her babysitters were doing pills and drinking. But she began using drugs in earnest "to be accepted, popular" in the seventh grade when her family moved and she entered a new middle school. She first smoked marijuana at a slumber party.

Allen was 10 when he started on a six-year use of a litany of drugs. He was "turned on" by his 13-year-old sister who stayed with him while his mother worked. "My sister would get me high to keep me from telling on her."

Pam and Allen are recovering addicts — recovering with the help of STRAIGHT, a drug rehabilitation program begun in Florida with a branch off Austell Road in Cobb County now. Pam and Allen are both from Cobb County.

The two teenagers told their stories this week, standing before a room full of adults at the Cobb County Board of Education's drug abuse seminar.

When Pam first started on marijuana and alcohol, she said she would never do harder drugs. By ninth grade, she was popping pills. She was skipping school without her mother's ever knowing. As her grades went down and she began losing control, she said she was scared but refused to go to anyone for help.

As her mother reached out to her, she lashed out. "I'm 16 years old and I can handle myself," she repeatedly told her family. But all along, "I wanted to be somebody special."

In the 10th grade, she was busted for pot and suspended from school. When her mother arrived at the school, "I couldn't look her in the face."

Soon she reached a point of not caring. Arriving home drunk one day, she and her mother had a major confrontation. The result was Pam's leaving home.

For three days she stayed with a young man in his apartment and did nothing but drugs, not even eating or sleeping. Feeling lonely and wanting help, she returned home bare footed, with ragged jeans on and dirty hair hanging in her face.

She was enrolled in STRAIGHT.

She began talking and sharing honestly with her family.

Now she is back in school and "I feel really good about who I am and where I'm going."

Hoping to major in criminal justice and become a probation officer, she realizes "I am important to myself."

Allen is another success story. But years ago the anguish he caused two families because of his drug problem seemed to suggest anything but a happy ending.

Starting drugs in the fifth grade, Allen was busted in the sixth after a girl passed out barbiturates on the bus.

His mother and father divorced. Allen spent the weekends living with his father, sneaking liquor and stealing from him. He also stole from his step-father who brought money home from the office for the company. The rest of the time he spent getting high and fighting.

"The only time I liked myself was when I was impressing other people," the tall blond said.

He also spent a great deal of time in the woods, examining his life.

In the ninth and 10th grades, he started robbing houses.

One night, the 11th grader and his real father clashed. Both were drunk and Allen was punched through his father's house window.

His arm "cut wide open" he ran for his woods. "That night I tried to kill myself." Squeezing his arm he thought about death as an escape from the yammering of teachers, friends and both families.

He stumbled to the road where his parents found him. For four months he "calmed down" but soon returned to robbing houses to support his \$100-a-day habit.

Forced by his parents into STRAIGHT, the program turned him around.

"I'm liking life. I can be real, be Allen, be the person I always wanted to be ... I'm my main priority now. I deal with my drug problem every day," he said.

Asked if anything in the schools would have made a difference, Pam, a cute blond in blue jeans, responded, "I think eventually I would have gotten into drugs. I wanted a lot of attention, be popular, that recognition. I saw druggies raising hell and I thought that looks fun, exciting."

"Nothing can be done to keep kids off drugs. It's their choice," the 17-year-old said. The advice she offered was to start drug education at a young age and keep open communications between parent and child.

"Start talking before kids start using drugs because after they won't listen," she said.



Staff Photo By George King

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DUFF GREENE DISCUSSES DRUG ABUSE
(L-R) Ann Wolfe, Junior League; B. Kretzmer, Unified Parents At Seminar