



FOCUS

STRAIGHT Head Tells About Drug Program

Two very different ways of utilizing our greatest resource — young people — were the subjects of two breakfast programs sponsored by the Cobb Chamber of Commerce this past week.

Dave Tilley, director of STRAIGHT Inc., works with youngsters aged 18-21 to replace a dependence on drugs with a dependence on a higher power.

"A textbook definition of STRAIGHT Inc. would be 'a drug rehabilitation program for youth,'" said Tilley to his Smyrna breakfast audience last Wednesday.

In practice, STRAIGHT Inc. works like this: To enter the program, a child must leave his old environment completely and come live with STRAIGHT Inc. As he learns about himself, his reasons for turning to drugs (which include alcohol) and learns to like and respect himself and others, he is weaned from the program. Eventually he will be placed with foster parents as an interim step to going home to his own family.

The young people attempt a seven-step process to free them-



DAVE TILLEY
STRAIGHT Director

selves from their dependence and peer pressure provides the major catalyst that adults just can't deliver, Tilley said. The average stay is 10 months and when a kid

"comes in," he must quit cold turkey.

Tilley only sells the program to adult audiences because teenagers don't buy the message. "Probably 95 percent of the kids don't want to be here at first," said Tilley.

Only after children already in the program get a chance to let them know they're not going to be flimflammed do the newcomers begin to adjust to the idea of getting straight. "You can con a teacher, parent or staffer but you can't con a con," said Tilley.

The eventual goal of the program is to reunite the family unit, which does wonders in helping keep the teenagers off drugs. Like alcoholism, drug dependence is a lifetime condition; even though the child is clean now, the dependence is always in place, ready to reclaim its host, Tilley said.

Proven successful in Florida STRAIGHT Inc. is new in Cobb County. As a former schoolteacher and principal in Cobb, Tilley has himself had to come to grips with the reality that drugs are a problem here as well as the big cities