



Junior staff members John [redacted] and Jessica [redacted] talk with STRAIGHT director Dave Tilley (center) in drug rehabilitation program's Marietta center in refurbished grocery store on Austell Road. 'Our program stresses a family solution,' Tilley says. 'The family needs to be together through it.' (Staff Photo by John W. Cary)

STRAIGHT

Teens Finding Freedom From Drugs

By **DONNA ESPY**
Staff Writer

The long, brick building looks deserted with its windows closed off and parking lot empty. But inside, more than 100 teenagers are seeking and finding freedom from drug dependency.

STRAIGHT Inc., a family-oriented, non-profit adolescent drug rehabilitation program, has been housed in the old A&P store building, located in the 2200' block of Austell Road in Marietta, since Aug. 15. Today, program administrators opened the renovated facility to the media to explain their purpose and goal.

The Cobb STRAIGHT program opened in August with 94 adolescents enrolled. Now 115 people, ranging in age from 12 to 21, are enrolled in the private rehabilitation program, said David Tilley, executive director of the facility.

Some 60 percent of those now in the program are Cobb residents,

Tilley said, with others coming from around the metro Atlanta area, out of state and even out of the country.

The 20,000-square foot building located on 2.5 acres can eventually accommodate up to 350 persons, Tilley said. The program uses the foster home concept in which participants stay overnight in homes of advanced STRAIGHT clients while they undergo up to 12 hours of daily counseling and group therapy to rid themselves of their drug habit.

The rehabilitation program consists of five phases, Tilley said.

In the first phase, the client is taken away from home and family for a period during which he works on himself and his feelings and parents attend several meetings on the problem at home.

In the second phase, clients are allowed to go home and try to resolve problems within the family unit. During phase three, clients

can start back to school or work and begin setting priorities for their life after becoming drug free.

In phase four, the client has more leisure time and is away from the program up to three days a week, getting back into the daily stream and developing new friendships.

Program officials said phase five is especially important to the total development of the program. In phase five a participant can aid newcomers to the program by sharing experiences and feelings through counseling sessions.

STRAIGHT uses the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous in the sense that drug users interact with staff members who have been through the program themselves and have experienced much of the same feelings and physical trauma, Tilley said.

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STRAIGHT Helps Drug Addicts

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A northwest Cobb resident, Tilley has an executive staff of four persons and a junior staff of seven persons, who have been through the program.

A former principal at J.J. Daniell Middle School in northeast Cobb, Tilley left his position as personnel administrator for the Cobb school system to head the Atlanta area STRAIGHT program.

Founded in 1978 in St. Petersburg, Fla., STRAIGHT opened a branch in Sarasota, Fla. in 1980, followed by the Cobb branch opening last month. A branch is planned to open within the next few months in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The Atlanta STRAIGHT program began in 1980 with eight interested citizens and blossomed into a committee which numbered about 250. That committee, Tilley said, raised \$150,000 to renovate the old A&P building, with \$50,000 coming from donations from local parents and \$100,000 from contributions by business and civic organizations.

STRAIGHT does not seek or accept

any government funding, Tilley said, and much of the operating money comes from grants and contributions from private businesses and organizations.

Client fees are based on a sliding scale according to parents' combined income, he said, and the maximum fee is \$3,500. No one is denied services by STRAIGHT if they are unable to pay for them, he added.

While the Cobb facility is currently open and actively receiving clients, Tilley said there are still many needs, including additional kitchen equipment, a sound system, folding partitions to separate rooms and additional office equipment.

The building and land for STRAIGHT was purchased for \$300,000 and refurbishing costs ran an additional \$100,000, Tilley said.

The move for almost 100 teens from St. Petersburg to Cobb was "very smooth," Tilley said, adding community support helped make STRAIGHT a reality in this area.

The 25-year-old director said about 80 percent of all clients who finish the

five-phase program and complete the seven steps of individual goals remain drug free, and many return to help others free themselves from the clutches of drug abuse — a major problem plaguing metro schools.

"Our program stresses a family solution," Tilley said. "The family needs to be together through it." He added often parents' travel is limited while their child is involved in STRAIGHT. Parents are required to attend a number of meetings on the subject of drug abuse and how to cope with it.

STRAIGHT will hold an Awareness Banquet Oct. 17 at the Atlanta Airport Marriott Hotel to acquaint the public on the way in which STRAIGHT works with individuals and families. The speaker will be Dr. Robert L. DuPont Jr., founder of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Tickets are \$25 per person and are a tax deductible donation to STRAIGHT.

For more information on STRAIGHT in Cobb or the banquet, call 454-8579.