

Straight Called Answer To Drug Crisis

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America is losing a generation of youth to mood-altering drugs.

That was the message of Cincinnati's first Straight Inc. "Awareness Banquet" on Thursday.

And Straight, the Florida-based drug rehabilitation program which has a branch near Milford, is the answer to 20 years of unanswered questions in drug rehabilitation, according to one national drug expert who spoke at Thursday's banquet in the Westin Hotel.

"The problem has always been to develop a program that works for kids, that gets the parents involved, and that is affordable," said Dr. Robert DuPont, president of the American Council on Marijuana and Other Psychoactive Drugs Inc. and former director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

"STRAIGHT IS the best drug treatment program in the country," DuPont said. "I've encouraged the program to move faster than it has in spreading across the country, because this program can become a focus for dissemination of these ideas to other areas."

DuPont said federal funding for more traditional drug programs concentrated on older drug users, particularly those abusing heroin. "The government still spends great amounts of money on drug treatment, but in effect the government effort ran out of gas," he said. "There was nowhere else to go, but government funding could never have achieved what Straight has achieved in the areas of mobilizing families and communities."

Dr. Miller Newton, national clinical director for Straight, said the use of marijuana since the early 1970s threw traditional drug rehabilitation programs into disarray, because

the psychoactive agents in marijuana remain in the body for up to 60 days.

"TO GIVE kids a chance to recover, then, we have to keep them in a drug-free environment for 90 days," he said. "Plus, the nature of drug treatment has to change for youths."

"Drugs give kids a push-button good feeling, and this short circuits their coping mechanisms," he said. "They stop developing. They need to be put back on track, they need to learn to develop their peer relations, to set future goals and to learn the use of time."

DuPont said a "huge" number of juveniles use marijuana or other drugs daily, despite recent indications that overall use is down. Part of this drop, he said, could be explained by statistics that show 20% of all daily drug users drop out of high school, and thus don't show up in surveys of drug use among seniors. Statistics also show, he said, that most adolescents now begin using drugs while in junior high school.

"People just don't grasp how serious this situation is," he said. "It's an epidemic, and the fallout in deaths and suicides from the Vietnam era probably won't be known for another 10 years."

DuPONT SAID he has been accused of being a zealot, "but what bothers me is the way the nation is underreacting to this problem. People just don't realize how many kids are involved in drugs and how serious the consequences are."

In opposition to traditional thinking that troubled families are families with youth drug problems, DuPont said the problem of drug abuse by youth cuts across good and bad families, rich and poor families, families with two parents or families of divorce and families of all social class.

DuPont said Straight is tough, even ex-terminating, but the program is temporary, he said, but it's not forever." He said, "Straight is not a easy program. It's just mighty wibble, and it's community response."

Newton said Straight does not include those youngsters who might have dabbled in drugs. "By the time kids get to Straight, there is a problem that was a long time coming," he said. "Most families would rather deny the problem, and by the time they realize a problem exists, there is a crisis."

WHERE AWARENESS has been raised, or where drug problems cannot be tolerated, effective drug treatment programs have begun, DuPont said. He cited the nuclear power industry as an example where quick action has been taken, and said the military is moving forward.

"The medical profession will have to come to grips with its drug problem, as will employers in industry, and the schools," he said.

"Schools can be made into drug-free zones," Newton said. "The help of parents is needed. Right now, the battleground is the family, but it must move to the schools, and to industry."

Straight is loosely modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous but provides a far more rigid structure, Newton said. In the early phases, the youth is removed from his home and school, and gradually wins the right to go home at night, after first staying at "foster" homes of others who are more advanced in the program.

"There are those who drop out and bad-mouth the program," he said. "That happens in Alcoholics Anonymous, too. It's part of the denial process. But for kids who finish the program, the success rate after six months is 60%, which I consider darn good."