

Youths hooked on drugs are now playing it Straight

By Tim Simmons
Post staff reporter

She was one of the kids who always had drugs. A kid who measured her importance by the growing list of chemicals she tried.

"Pot was first, then alcohol," said Tanya [redacted] a 22-year-old from Cincinnati. "The others? Opium, peyote, hash oil, hash, acid, mescaline, mushrooms, nitrous oxide. I suppose there were others."

It's going to be a long road back for Tanya, but she isn't kidding anyone this time—especially herself.

Matt [redacted] The three joined more than 300 other young people and family members Monday at Cincinnati Straight drug treatment program near Milford in Clermont County.

A visit by Nancy Reagan and Princess Diana to the Straight



program in Washington, D.C., brought everyone together. Through a live broadcast to Cincinnati, the young people and their families watched other families in other cities play out their own stories.

Cincinnati Straight Director Jerry Rushing bolstered the broadcast with recent statistics from the National Institute of Drug Abuse—statistics the families know all too well:

More than half of the high school seniors in the United States have tried marijuana. Co-

caine use is up. Daily use is up. Use of hard drugs is becoming more popular.

And the drugs pay no attention to race, social status or the wealth of a family. Tanya, Matt and Mike can attest to it.

Living in a town of about 18,000, Matt [redacted] was a high school junior in Centerville, Ohio, when he started using drugs regularly. It was speed and hash back then. And, of course, alcohol.

"I looked at the kids who looked like druggie people and said I'd never be that way," Matt said.

Like a druggie when he graduated from high school and went on to Wright State University.

Wright State and enrolling in the University of Dayton, he thought he had control of his life. After withdrawing from

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Dayton, it still wasn't hard to get a restaurant job and earn a weekly paycheck.

At one point, he even quit for six weeks.

His mom noticed, but "was really passive about it." His dad noticed and started riding him.

Three months ago, at age 20, Matt joined Straight. He'd lost a long battle with drugs. He had lost his will to live.

Mike [redacted] was going on 16 when he started drinking. He had two solid parents, a nice

home in Montgomery and a place on the high school soccer team.

His parents noticed the little things first. He was spending a lot of time out of the house. Conversations were stiff and tense.

"We figured it was part of growing up," Linda [redacted] said.

But they suspected more. Their suspicions were confirmed one night when Mike "overset" on a cheer at a school dance and got suspended.

Linda and her husband, Steve, figured that would be it—a well-deserved lesson, the end of a phase.

It wasn't. He quit the soccer team. His grades were dropping. Mike was routinely leaving the

house. He'd come in in the evening and go directly to his room.

Not wanting to know the answers to their questions, his parents said little.

Then, Mike got in an accident with the family car. He lied about it and said someone must have hit it while it was parked in the lot.

A week later—after the entire family had just returned from Saturday evening mass—a sheriff's deputy knocked on the door. He wanted to know about a hit-and-run accident involving the [redacted] car.

Mike joined Straight on Feb. 23. A graduate, he's been sober ever since.



Robert Dickerson/The Cincinnati Post

Mike ██████ center, and members of his family joined more than 300 youngsters and family members at Cincinnati Straight, a drug counseling treatment program

near Milford. The group came together Monday to watch a broadcast about drug addiction by Nancy Reagan and Princess Diana.