

Parents find hope

Third of five articles

By Nancy Berlier
First Staff Reporter

MT. REPOSE, Ohio — Dick and Marian Tarvin thought they were good parents and community-minded citizens when they started a drug awareness program in Hamilton County's Anderson Township.

But the Tarvins' extensive research into drug abuse failed to reveal that their son had been using drugs for so long he had lost control of his life.

Kay Jenk, divorced and disabled, said she thought about killing her 18-year-old son when she caught him selling drugs in her Greenhills home. At wit's end, she called a Hamilton County Juvenile court officer she knew.

"I TOLD him, 'If you don't find some place to put my son today, tomorrow when the phone rings you'll be coming to get me. I will have killed him.'"

Don and Paula Miller of Springfield Township in Hamilton County blamed themselves and made excuses for their son's troubles in school and with the law.

The Tarvins, Mrs. Jenk and the Millers turned to Straight Inc., a drug rehabilitation program for young people ages 12 to 22.

THE TARVINS' 22-year-old son completed Straight's program in St. Petersburg, Fla., and has returned to Cincinnati. The 18-year-old sons of Mrs. Jenk and the Millers are in Straight's program in Mt. Repose.

Teaching a seminar at Straight, Mrs. Tarvin tells new parents there are common traits among drug users, but not among parents. Youths who take drugs think and act the same way, she said, but their parents can be good or bad, rich or poor, educated or uneducated and still end up with chemically dependent children.

The Tarvins, Mrs. Jenk and the Millers are cases in point.

"I did not recognize what our son's silliness, not feeling good with himself, occasional depression could be drug related," Mrs. Tarvin said. "He got good grades throughout high school. He was an Eagle Scout. I felt like he had a good growing-up experience and a healthy, happy background."



Dick and Marian Tarvin

Photographer: BRUCE CRIPPEN

The Straight story

The Tarvins' son said he smoked marijuana every day of his senior year in Turpin High School's smoking area and never was caught.

"I decided that I knew all the answers in life and my parents were out of touch and Jesus freaks," he said. "I was caught up in a search for happiness and a search to find myself."

DRUGS WERE part of the "cool" lifestyle he wanted. He began hitchhiking across the country, finding odd jobs to buy alcohol and drugs. He sometimes was forced to ferret through garbage cans looking for food.

"I was out of control," he said. "That fact was so scary to me, it was so real, that I'd have to get drunk to hide from it."

By helping to organize Operation Wake-Up in Anderson Township, the Tarvins had heard about Straight's center in St. Petersburg.

"We made a decision that we were going to have to intervene in his life," Tarvin said.

He and his wife asked their son, legally an adult, to enter Straight. He said he agreed "to get my parents off my back," but once in the program made a commitment that changed his life.

Unlike the Tarvins' household, Mrs. Jenk has been raising her two sons alone since her divorce seven years ago. She was disabled in a work-related accident that has forced her to spend most of each day in bed.

Red Cross training and experience as an Emergency Medical Technician-Ambulance made Mrs. Jenk aware her son was taking drugs when he was 13.

"I picked up on him right

away," she said.

CONFRONTED, he promised to stop smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. He didn't. Over a period of time, he became more blatant about his drug and alcohol habits. He even began selling drugs at home.

Mrs. Jenk sought help through the family's doctor, a psychiatrist, church and school counselors and juvenile court officials. The experience made her bitter because of what she says was their lack of responsiveness.

Finally, a juvenile court officer recommended Straight. Her son, wearing the same unwashed clothes he had worn for four weeks, was placed in the program in May.

"I spent 10 days crying after he was in the program," she said. "Relief, three years of bitterness, resentment and anger came out."

"When a mother prays to God that something would happen to her son or wants to kill him, it's bad. It's bad."

Mrs. Miller never hoped her son would die, but she admitted looking forward to the day he turned 18 and would leave home.

The Millers said their son began having behavioral problems when he was 12, and they spent three years taking him to a psychologist. They thought their son felt rejected by his biological father even though he had known Miller as his father since age 4.

Last year, their son was suspended from school after selling marijuana to some of his friends. A police officer told the Millers their son had a drug problem.

First admitted to Straight's St. Petersburg center, the Millers' son moved back to Cincinnati when the Mt. Repose center opened in January.

The younger Miller is now a staff trainee in the program.

Next: An open meeting.