

Teen Claims She Was Forced Into 'Straight'

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Enquirer Reporter

Cyndi [REDACTED] turned herself in to Clermont County authorities Wednesday on a criminal damaging charge after she broke a window in her parents' Mount Carmel home.

But the 18-year-old Miss [REDACTED] claims she broke it in a desperate attempt to "escape" from the home of her parents, Robert and Sherry [REDACTED].

She said she fled her parents' home at 4 a.m. May 2.

She contended the escape climaxed a two-month period when she was held against her will in Straight Inc., an intensive and strict drug rehabilitation program established in Clermont County four months ago.

It operates on the philosophy

that just as peer pressure usually gets teens involved in drug abuse, peer pressure will get them straight.

"I was forced into Straight," Miss [REDACTED] said. "No way was that willingly."

BUT HER parents countered that the young woman voluntarily signed herself into the program. Program director Jerry Rushing said no one is ever "forced" into the program.

Her father, a Clermont County attorney, swore out the warrant against his daughter. The charge is a second-degree misdemeanor.

After pleading not guilty, she was released on her own recognition. A pre-trial hearing is scheduled for June 10.

She was represented by attorney Jonathan Schiff.

Schiff, who also acts as a co-

operating lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, previously had asked the Ohio Bureau of Drug Abuse to look into four other incidents at the Straight Inc. facility.

Schiff said Wednesday he has not received a copy of the report from the state bureau.

Miss [REDACTED] father said Wednesday he filed the charge "in hopes she could be convicted and the terms of her probation could be that she be court-ordered back into Straight."

HE SAID his daughter has a history of behavioral problems connected to drugs and alcohol.

"I plan to do whatever is within the law to help this child get chemically free," he said.

But Miss [REDACTED] said drugs are not the issue. "I've been off drugs for over a year. I went

through a drug rehabilitation program 1½ years ago. I've been involved in Alcoholics Anonymous. I've taken care of my drug problem. I'm proud of the progress I've made."

And she charged that drugs is not the issue. She admitted she is a lesbian and said her parents are adamant in their opposition to her choice of lifestyle.

But both her mother and father said they don't care about that as long as their daughter is free of drugs.

"The fact that she has been doing drugs since she was nine years old is the problem," said her mother.

Miss [REDACTED] said she initially went to Straight Feb. 27 with her parents for a "sibling interview"

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so she would be allowed to see her brothers, ages 12 and 17, who are in the program.

There, she said she was questioned for five hours about her use of drugs.

Then, she said, she was asked to sign a piece of paper. They said to try the program for 14 days and if I didn't like it, I could leave."

Miss [redacted] said she refused and the doorway was blocked, preventing her exit.

"THEY BROUGHT my parents in and they (the parents) said if I didn't sign in, I'd never see my brothers or them," she recalled.

She said neither her parents nor Straight personnel physically moved her hand while she signed the paper.

Rushing denied that Miss [redacted] was forced into the program.

But he said the young people and staff members who question siblings of clients are very direct. "We don't just sit there and have a casual conversation. That's not

true in any drug treatment approach.

"When you have chemical dependency, you treat the family. If the sibling is a problem drug user, we try to talk about treatment with him or her," he said.

Rushing said if the sibling is 18 or older, he or she does not have to sign up. He said there is no coercion.

There are five phases to the program, Rushing said.

IN THE first phase, Miss [redacted] said "oldcomers," linking their fingers in the back belt loops of her pants, would accompany her everywhere.

Rushing said the belt-looping is so that the "youngster always has someone with him or her for support. It's more a symbol than a security precaution."

"On the 11th day, I told the group session I was going to pull myself from the program," she said. "They froze me on the 11th day. There is no way to pull yourself from the program."

"THERE IS a process of signing yourself out," Rushing countered. "They have to inform the

appropriate people in the program. When kids want to leave, it's usually they want to do it on an impulse. There's some issue they don't want to deal with or they're feeling bad."

He said impulsiveness and denial are characteristics of drug dependency.

If a teen-ager wants to leave, he said a family conference is called. If after that an 18-year-old would want to leave, he or she can do so, said Rushing.

Not so, said Miss [redacted]. "I had been saying I wanted to get out from the first day," she said. "I don't see that as impulsive."

She said "newcomer" teen-agers spend nights at "foster" homes, the homes of oldcomer teens.

At her two foster homes, she said she had to ask permission for everything she did, and doors and windows in the house were always locked.

RUSHING ADMITTED Straight is a strict, structured program. He said the clients, whose parents pay up to \$2,500 for

the program, are not allowed to do anything they want anytime.

Of the locked doors, Rushing said the foster parents are responsible for the newcomers in their home.

He also said any complaints newcomers level are investigated and rectified if there is a problem.

Miss [redacted] said she began complying with the program and, after 49 days, she made it to the second phase. That allowed her to return to her parents' home at night.

Some two weeks later, she "escaped."

"EVERY OPPORTUNITY I would have to leave, I felt my brother or father would stop me," she said.

"When I'd get around people after I got out, I was terrified," she said. "I'm having a hard time adjusting to society. It's difficult after being controlled for two months."

But her parents maintain Straight is a way to help their daughter.

"It's a loving program," [redacted] said. "It's a damn tough program for both the parents and kids. But it works."