

Project Clients' Message Same For First Lady

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MOUNT REPOSE—Even under normal circumstances, Step 4 is one of the most difficult.

Step 4, one of the seven steps in Straight's guide to overcoming drug abuse, reads:

Admit to God, myself and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.

It wasn't "God" or "myself" who made Step 4 so tough Monday night.

It was the "another human being":

Nancy Reagan and her traveling retinue of attaches and Secret Service agents, and 30 people carrying cameras, tape recorders and notebooks.

It made for some sweatier palms and some drier throats among the confessors, but their message was the same as on any other Monday night.

LIKE MANY of their peers, they drank and smoked pot. But they'd smoked more, drank more, and advanced to other drugs such as Qualudes, acid and opium.

Like their peers, they fought with their parents, got depressed, got into trouble.

But they'd done it more often, and more seriously—many contemplated suicide, some tried it. Some were arrested for drug possession, many had run away from home.

A show-of-hands roll call by the 140-some teenagers indicated almost all were on drugs at least for six months.

They were high in school, high at the supper table. Almost all said they shoplifted at one time or another to raise money for their habit.

Most of the boys said they carried weapons sometimes, some committed breaking and enterings.

MANY SMOKED pot and did other drugs when babysitting. A dozen raised to hands to say they even got children they were babysitting high.

Even under normal circumstances—a gathering of some classmates, parents and staff—confessions such as these can be wrenching.

But when TV cameras and tape recorders are recording your every word and the First Lady sits transfixed by it all, the experience is even tougher.

But the teenagers persevered.

Beneath Straight's seven steps which hang like commandments on the wall of the meeting room, at their Clermont County School, here were some of the experiences they recounted for Mrs. Reagan, the media and an extra-large audience of parents and staff.

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SHANNON, A teen-aged boy, has been in the program for 7 days and on drugs for six or seven years. He'd done mushrooms, cocaine, and opium, among others.

"I even stole money off my mom and dad so I could keep doing drugs."

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Matt, a high schooler, has done, pot, speed, opium, hashish, acid, "anything I could get my hands on."

He'd been doing drugs for 4 years, and in the program for seven days.

He said he wanted to get closer to his family now, and "get back on the right track."

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SOME TOLD of experiences with "drugs" outside the mainstream.

Paul couldn't get his hands on booze or pot at boarding school, so he tried paint-thinner, "even anti-perspirant because I thought I might be able to get high on that."

Cheryl said when she ran out of money for conventional drugs, she began rummaging through her grandmother's shoebox full of prescription pills.

"I read the labels and just started popping anything that I thought I'd heard of or thought might work."