

# Program on drugs assailed

## Straight Inc. sued by donors, clients

BY JACK HICKS

The Cincinnati Enquirer

A Straight Inc. official said Tuesday that the drug program is under no obligation to return donations from the Cincinnati area.

Linda Hedden, Straight vice president for research and development, said those contributions served hundreds of area families.

But the Florida-based program — spotlighted by First Lady Nancy Reagan and others for rehabilitating youngsters with drug problems — has closed its Clermont County facility and is being sued by Cincinnati area individuals and corporations to recover \$1.5 million contributed to lure it here in 1982.

### Expected to stay

The class-action suit, filed in Hamilton County Common Pleas Court, maintains the donations came with the understanding that Straight would start and maintain a program in Greater Cincinnati.

Plaintiffs include individuals who enrolled their children in the Straight program, as well as the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, the Kroger Co., the Procter & Gamble Co., and Ohio Attor-

ney General is responsible for enforcing laws relating to charitable trusts and gifts.

The plaintiffs want the money returned to the area for use in drug rehabilitation.

Straight has supporters locally, but its rehabilitative methods at the center on Branch Hill Guinea Pike in Clermont County became increasingly controversial during its half-dozen years.

Critics claim the program isolated patients from their families and scrutinized friends and associates of family members.

At one point, the Clermont County center enrolled more than 200 young clients with drug or alcohol problems.

At one point, the Clermont County center enrolled more than 200 young clients with drug or alcohol problems. Enrollment dwindled as charges and legal actions increased.

At the same time, the number of drug rehabilitation beds offered by other more conventional facilities was increasing.

Hedden said Tuesday from Florida that competitive treatment programs and declining enrollment led to the decision to phase out the Clermont County center.

"The whole industry has changed. There are a lot of treatment programs open now in Cincinnati. When we came, there weren't," she said.

### Harsh experiences

Attorney Tim Smith, who has represented families of three clients in suits against Straight, alleged the program deprived youngsters of good food, comfortable living conditions, friends and family.

"A nightmare," parent Shelly Rybolt of Fairfield called the Straight program. She wasn't permitted to see her daughter for 10 months, and program regulations wouldn't permit her to invite her own friends into her house, she said.

Matt [REDACTED] a former Straight patient and counselor, said Straight attempts to impose military-like discipline on the clients, but many of those in authority are untrained.

Ken [REDACTED] whose son was enrolled  
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# Straight

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at Straight for eight months, said program rules required family members to obtain permission of teen-aged counselors to go out of town.

"If families broke the rules they were ridiculed in front of others. It was like being drummed out of the Army, the kind of thing you see in

He withdrew his son from the program and didn't try to recover the money he paid in advance, [redacted] said. His son is now getting along well and is back in college, he said.

For a time, Straight enjoyed excellent public relations in Greater Cincinnati. The high point may have come when Nancy Reagan [redacted] in 1984.

The local and national press was there to record it, and the first lady invited a 16-year-old Straight patient, Robin [redacted] to accompany her on a four-city trip to promote drug abuse prevention.

Now 20, [redacted] is among those who have favorable things to say

about Straight. "It was very good for me," said the Norwood woman.

"A lot of people don't achieve, and then they want to blame others," [redacted] said. "Maybe some others did have it bad, but I don't think all they say happened really happened," she said.

"I had a good experience. I can't say anything bad about it," said [redacted] who was enrolled in the Straight program for one year and two weeks.

[redacted] said she has been drug-free for three years ago. "It definitely helped me. I have no complaints."

Michael [redacted] of Pierce Township, Clermont County, is another who said he was helped by Straight. He now has a good job, a wife and two children.

"We regret that we can't help everyone, but we try to provide families with a program that can help them," Hedden said.

She acknowledged the Straight program is emotionally difficult for youngsters and their families, but denied that physical abuse was or is a part of it. The peer-pressure system has proven successful, she said, noting that Straight operates centers in seven other areas of the country.