

# metro

## Losing identity —and a lot more

### Inside Straight

*Post reporter Nancy Berlier recently spent three days inside Straight Inc., where she talked with the staff, parents who have placed their children in the program and the young participants. This is the first in a series of stories about that experience.*

**By Nancy Berlier**  
*Post Staff Reporter*

**MT. REPOSE, Ohio** — A teenage girl wipes tears from her eyes as she sobs her testimonial of promiscuity, lying and chemical dependency.

She tells a group of kids, as participants are uniformly called at the controversial drug rehabilitation center, that she was thrown out of her house after her father caught her having sex with her boyfriend in the basement.

"He said he didn't want a little slut like me around the house," she said. "I felt so hurt inside. I felt he didn't care anymore. I just felt like giving up."

**TALES OF** drug abuse, promiscuity, homosexuality, bestiality, rape, violence, stealing and lying—usually laced with streetwise profanity—can shock a first-time observer of rap sessions at Straight Inc. in

this small Clermont County community.

So can the rigidly structured program, which has been embroiled in controversy since the Mt. Repose center opened in January. Group therapy is confrontive, and the first thing kids learn is that speech, television, radio, music and choice of clothing are privileges, not rights.

And no newcomer to Straight has any privileges.

Consider:

- When a youngster enters Straight, he is placed in a foster home where others who have been in the program longer take care of him and enforce Straight's long list of rules.

- He cannot watch television or listen to the radio.

- He may talk, eat, exercise and go to the restroom only after receiving permission. He literally is led around by his belt loops to let him know he is not

trusted.

- The doors in the center's meeting rooms are guarded—just in case someone makes a break for freedom.

- Most of each day is spent in rap sessions, with breaks in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon to sing fast, upbeat songs like "Zippity Do Da," "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" and "Up with People."

- Participants are required to sit straight in their chairs, facing the speaker. Girls sit on the right side of the room, boys on the left. Mingling is prohibited.

- Participants confront each other with what Straight calls "tough love" and the skepticism of "having been there."

"I understand your feelings about the incident, but the question is what did you do to make your dad mad?" a girl asks the youngster who cried about being thrown out of her house.

**ONE AFTER** another, youths wave their arms, hoping for a chance to speak face-to-face with the girl. Most of the youngsters tell her she is having a "pity party" and not taking re-

sponsibilities for her actions.

Finally, she is told by junior staff members to sit down.

As is their custom at the end of each testimonial, the rest of the group tells her in unison, "love you."

Another girl tells the group she feels "really guilty and angry with myself" for striking her mother after being accused of lying.

Her testimonial is greeted with skepticism.

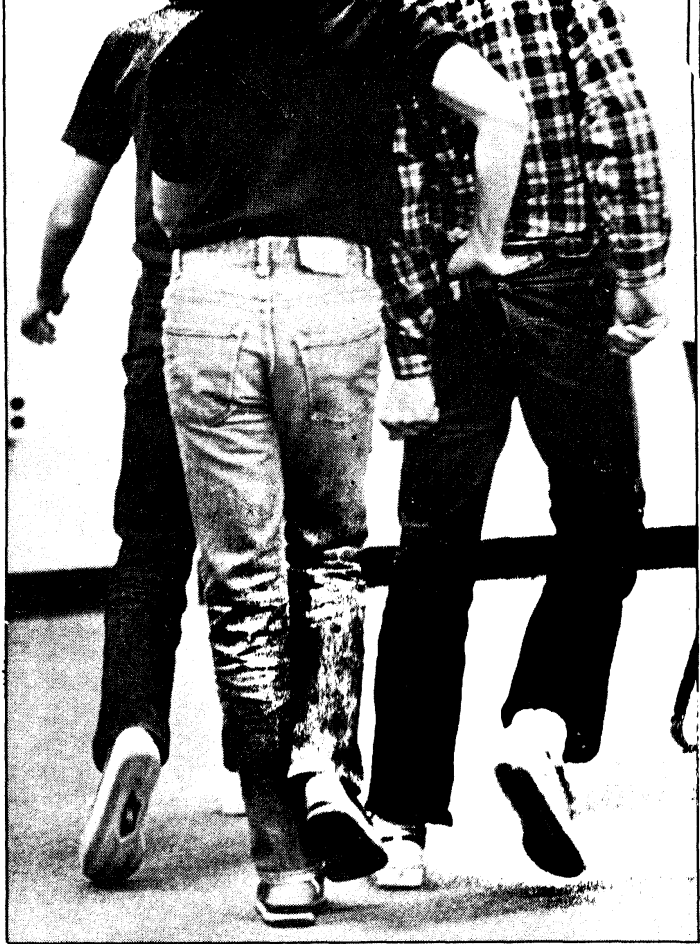
"You're holding back. You're not trusting this group," another girl tells her.

"You're still lying," another youth says.

**MAKING CHANGES** is the focal point of the discussions because changes determine how rapidly youths complete the program.

"You can sit there and talk until you're blue in the face and share all these feelings," one rap leader said, "but if you don't change, you're not doing anything."

**Next: The kids.**



Photographer: PATRICK REDDY

A youth who has earned responsibilities guides two newcomers to the restroom.

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### Inside Straight

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*Staff Writer*

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that small Clermont County community.

So can the tightly structured program, which has been established in consistency since the Mt. Pleasant center opened in January. Group therapy is confrontative and the first thing kids learn is that speech, television, radio, music and choice of clothing are privileges, not rights.

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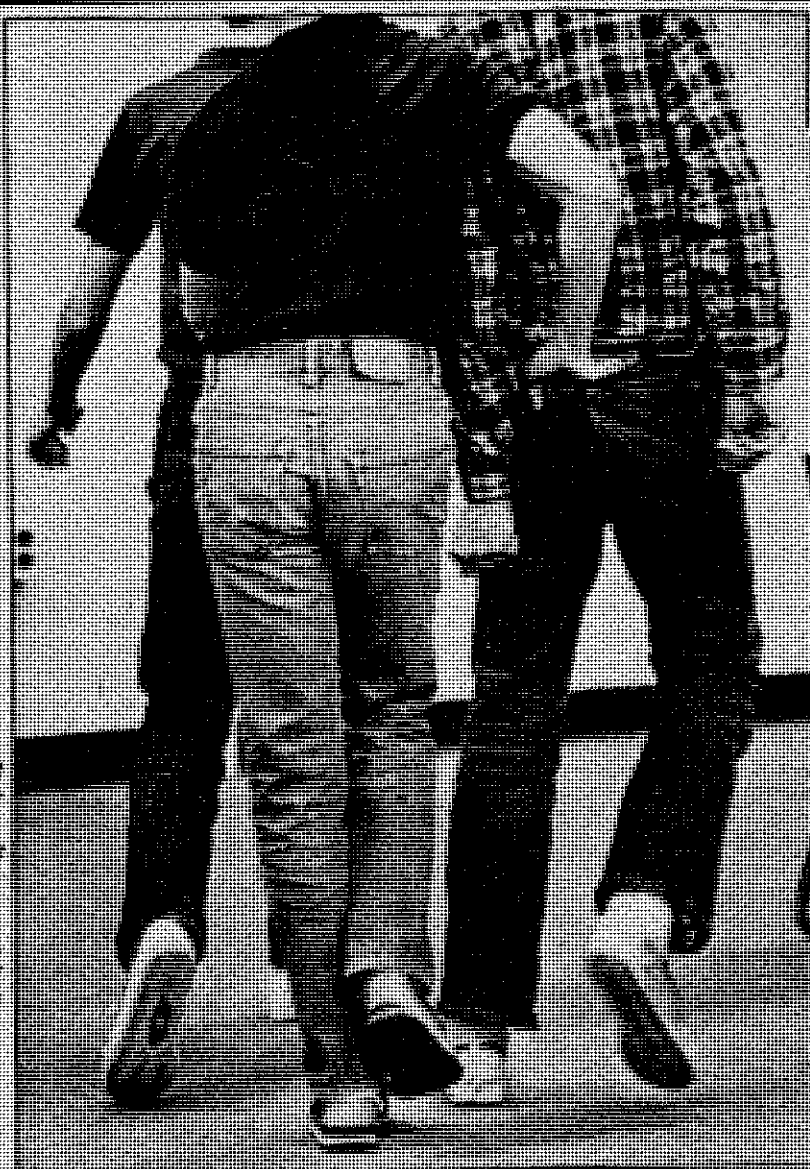
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Next: The kids.



A youth who has earned responsibilities guides two newcomers to the restroom.

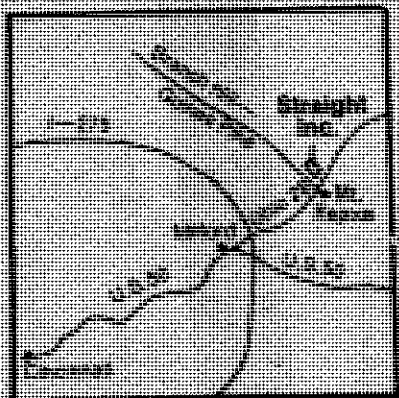
# Rehabilitation program grows despite controversy

**MT. PLEASANT, Ohio** — Since Straight Inc. opened its drug rehabilitation center, its clients have grown in number from 25 to 174.

Now, the Cincinnati-area families who provide financial support for the center are raising money to expand the renovated warehouse building at 5910 Bennett Hill-Thomas Pike where youths 15 to 18 undergo intensive group therapy. The expansion will accommodate 200 more youths and should be completed within a year, according to Jerry Eushing, director of the center.

**WITH FIVE** centers now open in St. Petersburg and Orlando, Fla.; Atlanta, Ga.; and Washington, D.C., in addition to Mt. Pleasant—Straight's goal is to be able to open off five new centers a year, Eushing said.

"We'll be nationwide in 10 years, easily," he said.



Straight is growing despite controversy over its peer-pressure treatment method. Some divorced parents have fought Straight in the courts to restrict visiting rights with children removed from them in the program. And Straight opponents have complained of brainwashing and physical abuse at the hands

of other youths in the program.

Straight's treatment is modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous and based on the premise that if peer pressure gets youths hooked on drugs, then peer pressure can get them off.

According to statistics provided by Straight, half the youths who complete the program stay off drugs for a year. That success rate is higher than that of less intensive drug programs, according to Straight.

**THE MT. PLEASANT** center employs a director, assistant director and program coordinator with education and experience in drug abuse counseling. The center also has a physician who makes regular visits and recommends care for emergencies. However, most group therapy sessions are conducted by paraprofessionals called junior staff

members; youths who received their training as clients in the program.

The program costs \$200 per client no matter how long the person is in the program. Parents also pay an additional \$40 per month for food and are asked for donations in the Monday and Friday night meetings they are required to attend.

On average, youths complete the program in 11 months. The program is organized in five phases.

In the first phase, the entry level, youths are removed from all contact with the world outside Straight. They are taken out of their homes and schools. They are placed in foster homes; the homes of youths in upper phases of the program.

A **NEWCOMER** spends nine to 15 hours daily in the program with no days off. Most of each

day is spent in rap sessions that emphasize attitudes and self-worth coming to grips with drug problems and what drugs have done to their lives.

In the second phase, a youth's movements are restricted to home and Straight. The regimen calls for youths to spend an average of 15 hours in Straight Monday through Saturday and seven hours on Sunday as they begin rebuilding their family relationships.

In the third phase, youths begin working on achievement, facing up to their drug-using peer culture and learning to say no to drugs and yes to being straight. They are permitted to return to school or to work.

A tapering-off period begins in the fourth phase, with youths spending only four days a week, after school or after work, and one weekend day in the pro-

gram. The emphasis is on constructive use of leisure time, building positive friendships, setting goals and learning to plan their time instead of acting impulsively.

**IN THE FINAL** phase, youths attend the program three days a week after school or after work and are free to choose their own leisure activities.

Straight's after-care program, which is strictly voluntary, is called the Seven Step Society; seven steps to a drug-free life.

Youths become "seven steps" upon completion of the program and are asked to attend meetings once weekly for three months and less frequently thereafter until they feel they can make a complete and clean break.

Henry Barber