

Youths, parents

Fourth of five articles

By Nancy Berlier

Post Staff Reporter

MT. REPOSE — Upbeat songs echo in the hallways of Straight Inc. each Monday and Friday night, as parents wait outside the closed doors of the drug rehabilitation center's meeting room.

Some parents complain about being tired after rushing home from work to grab a quick dinner—if they had that much time—before driving 30 or 45 minutes to Mt. Repose. Finding supportive new friends there, parents exchange hurried stories about their children's progress, or lack of it.

Parents faithfully attend each open meeting, even after they are shocked—as they stand before nearly 500 other parents and youths—to hear, sometimes for the first time, that drugs led their child to become a prostitute, have a homosexual relationship or become promiscuous.

INSIDE THE meeting room, chairs have been arranged so 174 youths in the program face the empty chairs

They bare their souls because each parent in the room had similar problems. . . .

their families will fill. Junior staff members call out the names of youngsters who will talk to their parents, get responsibilities for the next week, be promoted to a higher phase or return home for the first time since entering the program. The announcements have an uplifting effect on the youths, who, in unison, loudly call out the name of each youngster who has earned a privilege.

When the doors open at 6:30 p.m. for parents to enter, the youths belt out what has become their theme, "I Am Straight," sung to the tune of "I Am Woman."

After the parents are seated and the singing ends the director and assistant director walk side-by-side up the middle aisle, turn and greet the audience. The director asks that "what you see and hear remains here" before turning the meeting over to two junior staff members seated on tall stools between the groups of youths and parents.

The "rap" leaders call for newcomers to introduce themselves. Each introducer follows the same format:

"My name is . . . I am . . . years old. The drugs I've taken are . . . I've been in the program for . . . days. I am a druggie."

Then, each youth mentions something about his or her past, present and future.

While some youths matter-of-factly confess secrets of their drug-ridden lifestyles, others become tearful. In between newcomers, those who have been in the program longer face the crowd and talk about the changes they are making.

When the youths have concluded, a couple in the front row stand to face other parents. Each parent tells the group what life with a "druggie" was like.

"WE THOUGHT, 'He's just experimenting, it's the normal adolescent thing to do,'" said a mother.

As she talks, her husband nervously shuffles his feet, clasps his hands behind his back and then shifts them to his front.

Because of their son's behavior, relationships in the family became strained and abnormal, the father tells the group. He glances at his wife; she returns the look with a smile.

"I'm frustrated. I'm angry with my son. I'm irritated with my wife. I'm starting to wonder what was happening between us," the father says.

The father said he had doubts about putting his son in such a rigid program, even after the son was there.

"I really had trouble accepting the program," the father says. When the son ran away, "I felt maybe it's my fault. Maybe I should be more committed."

THEY BARE THEIR souls because each parent in the room had similar problems dealing with drug-dependent children. When the couple sit down, the applause is loud and sustained.

What follows is a series of heart-breaking conversations across a crowded room between parents and their children.

As a couple stand, either the husband or wife gripping a microphone passed along the row, their child stands up to face them. It is a time for parents to talk and children to listen. The only response permitted children is, "Love you, Mom. Love you, Dad."

At times, the discourse is joyful

A father tells his son: 'You've got to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.'

enough to elicit applause and critical enough to leave a child crying in his chair as the microphone silently is passed on.

Most parents say only "I love you" to their children, but some unleash strong sentiments.

"I FEEL GOOD about you being here," a mother says to her son, "be-

bare souls at Straight



Photographer PATRICK REDDY

Young people at Straight show support for one another at the end of a meeting.

cause there's one thing I don't need around the house anymore and that's a liar and a thief."

A father tells his son: "You've got to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps."

Encouraging the youth to work hard in the program, the father tells him he can return home straight or not at all.

Two other mothers, disappointed that their children had disobeyed the program rules and resisted change, "... feel really hurt and disappointed and scared because you're sitting over there frozen on day 20 (of the program)." The other says, "I'm not going to say 'I love you' because you're acting like this after all you've been through."

QUIETLY AND tearfully, the children tell their mothers they love them—and they sit down.

When children shout "Talk" or "Fourth phase" and their parents stand

to speak, the audience erupts with deafening applause.

Parents don't know if their children have earned privileges or promotions until they are told in the open

The most touching moment comes when a child shouts, 'Coming home.'

meeting. Broad smiles cross the faces of parents as they take the microphone to offer congratulations.

The most touching moment comes when a child shouts, "Coming home," and dashes across the room to hug his parents, from whom he has been separated since entering Straight.

When a youngster earns the right

to live at home again, he continues in the program and his parents' house becomes a foster home for youngsters in lower phases of the program.

At the end of the meeting, parents join hands and recite the Lord's Prayer.

THEN, MOST of the parents form lines in the back of the room, waiting for the doors to be opened, while parents whose children have earned "talk" privileges wait for the children to be brought to them.

This is a time for children to talk and parents to listen. It's a time for children to make amends, confessing troubling guilt about lies and problems and apologizing to their parents.

While those parents begin listening to their children, the doors open for the remainder of the parents to leave.

As they walk out, the children remaining in the group sing, "I'm on My Way."

Next: Not for everyone.

Youths, parents bare souls at Straight

Fourth of five articles

By Nancy Barber

Staff Writer

BY THE WAY — Unusual songs echo in the hallways of Straight Inc. each Monday and Friday night as parents wait outside the closed doors of the drug rehabilitation center's meeting room.

Some parents complain about being tired after rushing home from work to grab a quick dinner. If they had that much time — before arriving at 7 or 8 minutes to Mt. Vernon's Pioneer cooperative new friends meet, parents exchange hurried stories about their children's progress or lack of it.

Parents faithfully attend each open meeting, even after they are ejected — or they stand before nearly 50 other parents and youths, to hear, sometimes for the first time, that drugs led their child to become a prostitute, have a homosexual relationship or become promiscuous.

INSIDE THE meeting room, chairs have been arranged so the youths in the program face the empty chairs.

While some youths matter-of-factly confess details of their drug-addicted lifestyles, others become tearful. In between, sometimes those who have been in the program longer face the crowd and talk about the changes they are making.

When the youths have concluded, a couple in the front row stand to face other parents. Each parent tells the crowd what life with a "druggie" was like.

"WE TEND TO," they just experimenting, it's the normal adolescent thing to do," said a mother.

As she talks, her husband nervously shuffles his feet, claps his hands behind his back and then scuffs them to his front.

Because of their son's behavior, relationships in the family became strained and abnormal, the father tells the group. He glances at his wife; she returns the look with a smile.

"I'm frustrated, I'm angry with my son, I'm irritated with my wife, I'm starting to wonder what was happening between us," the father says.

The father said he had doubts about getting his son in such a rigid program, even after the son was there.

"I really had trouble accepting the program," the father says. When the son ran away, "I felt maybe it's my fault. Maybe I should be more committed."

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What follows is a series of heart-breaking conversations across a crowded room between parents and their children.

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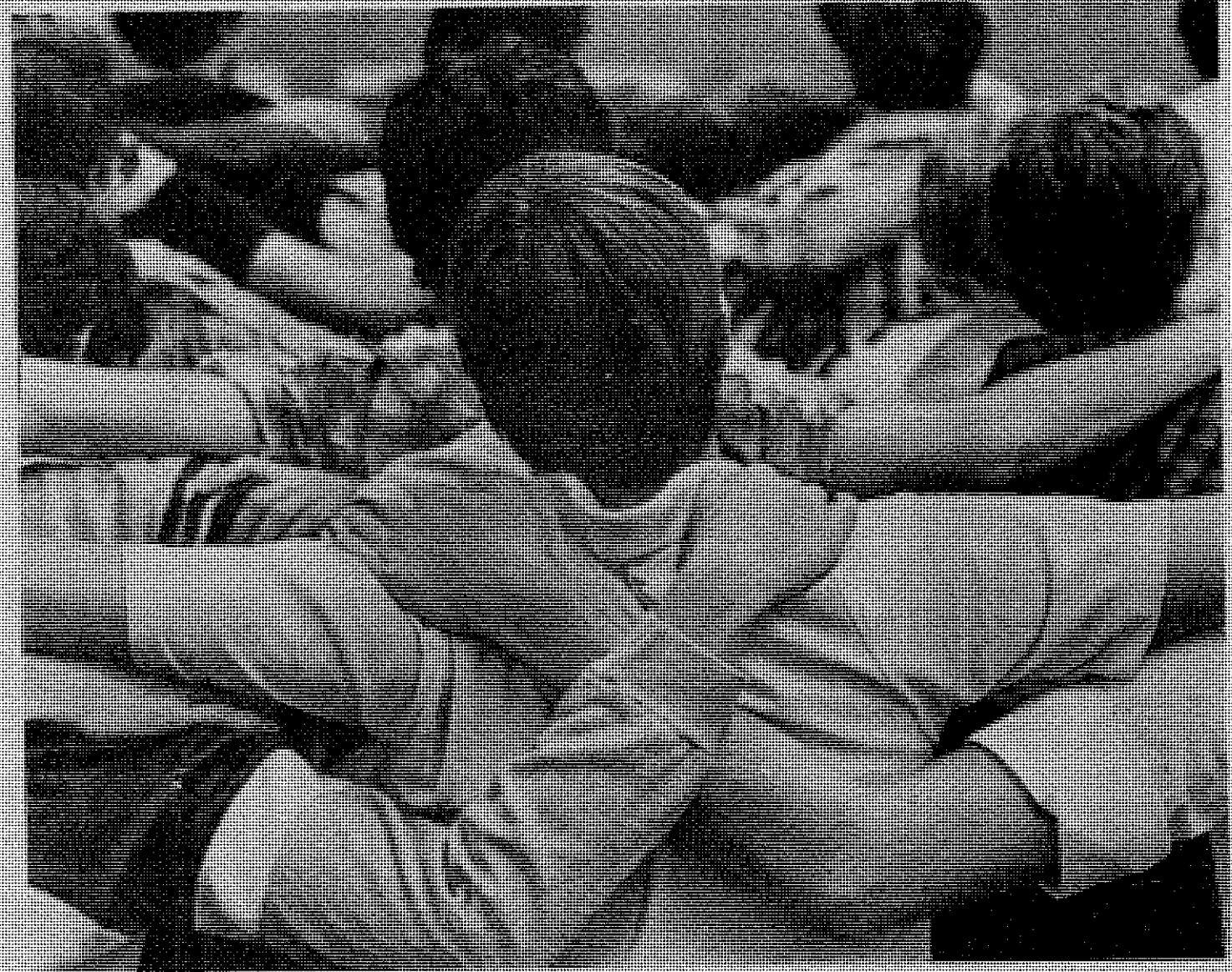
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their families will fill Junior staff members call out the names of youngsters who will talk to other parents and responsibilities for the next week, be promoted to a higher phase or return home for the first time since entering the program. The announcements have an uplifting effect on the youths, who, in unison, loudly call out the name of each youngster who has earned a privilege.

When the doors open at 8:30 p.m. for parents to enter, the youths belt out what has become their theme, "I Am Straight" sung to the tune of "I Am a Woman."

After the parents are seated and the singing ends, the director and assistant director walk side-by-side up the middle aisle, turn and greet the audience. The director asks last, "what you see and hear reminds you?" before turning the meeting over to two former staff members seated on left seats between the groups of youths and parents.

The "new" leaders call for newcomers as an introductory exercise. Each introduction follows the same format:

"My name is . . . I am . . . years old. The drugs we talked are . . . I've been in the program for . . . days. I am a . . . addict."

Then, each youth mentions something about his or her past, present and future.

cause there's one thing I don't need around the house anymore and that's a law and a thief."

A father tells his son, "You've got to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps."

Encouraging the youth to work hard in the program, the father tells him he can return home straight or not at all.

Two other mothers, disappointed that their children had disobeyed the program rules and received charges, "I feel really hurt and disappointed and worried because you're sitting over there hoping to day about the program." The other says, "I'm not going to say I love you because you're acting like this after all you've been through."

QUIETLY AND tearfully, the children tell their mothers they love them — and they sit down.

When children shout "Talk" or "Faith phase" a staff parent stand

to speak, the audience erupts with deafening applause.

Parents don't know if their children have earned privileges or promotions until they are told in the open forum.

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The most touching moment comes when a child shouts, "Coming home," and dashes across the room to hug his parents from whom he has been separated since entering Straight.

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to see at home again, he rushes to the program and his parents' house because a foster home for youngsters in lower phases of the program.

At the end of the meeting, parents join hands and recite the Lord's Prayer.

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