

EIGHTEEN AND DRUG-FREE

Dallas Morning News, The (TX) (Published as The Dallas Morning News) - September 9, 1986

- Author/Byline: Connie Pryzant, The Dallas Morning News (DAL) + _____
- Edition: HOME FINAL
- Section: TODAY
- Page: 4c

David first drank at age 10 or 11, tried pot in seventh grade and gradually experimented with harder drugs until his whole life focused only on getting high.

Now 18, he has lied, stolen and begged for drugs. He has made his Highland Park home a living hell for his family. He has run away; he's been kicked out. He has alienated friends; he has hated himself.

Yet he's one of the lucky ones.

As a result of an inner voice that finally broke through his self-deception, and caring parents who could afford to find a treatment program that works for him, David has been straight for 161 days.

"In one week, I realized that I had hurt my family, my life was leading nowhere, and that I had better start doing something if I wanted to get straight,' says David, who asked that his last name not be used.

The treatment program that helped David is Straight Inc. of Richardson, one of eight national centers offering regimented recovery programs involving the drug addict and his or her family.

In five months, David has shown enough progress to earn privileges most teens take for granted -- living at home, driving a car, attending Highland Park High School and working part-time for his dad, a Dallas developer.

But he cannot go out socially without at least one of his parents along and he can't talk to girls for several months. He must sleep in a room with an alarm on the door. And he must request permission 72 hours in advance for any activity beyond work and school.

David cannot recall when or where he first tried alcohol, or even why. And about the only reason he can give for becoming an addict and alcoholic is that he constantly sought the teen-ager's "American Dream' of being cool.

"I wanted to have long hair, be the freak, have the rock 'n' roll image,' he says.

"We knew David was involved in something over his head, but we just couldn't put our finger on it,' says his mother, Debbie. "At that time, the level of knowledge about drugs in the community was almost non-existent, and the school can't call you every day because they have so much going on.'

In January 1984, David admitted his drug problem and asked his parents for help. So began his cycle of treatment programs and eventual relapses.

"I was totally dishonest,' David says.

David's worst relapse occurred last February, when he left home for two months. He stole his father's credit cards, wrote bad checks, spent every night at clubs, took drugs constantly and lived for weeks not knowing where he was going to sleep the next night.

"I felt unwanted all the time,' he says. "Near the end, I felt worse when I did get high. And when I came down, it was bad, too.'

Finally he asked his parents for one more chance to recover. "I didn't have too many places left to go,' he says.

"David was about to turn 18, and when he did, there was nothing we could do legally anymore,' says his father, Buzz. "I told him I was writing my last check for treatment.'

Through Straight, David has realized he will have a chemical dependency problem all his life. He's scared of a relapse, but he says he's strong enough to think he can avoid one.

And although he's sacrificed several years of teen-age life to drugs, he's gained his future back.

Last week, he began Highland Park High School as a sophomore. He wants to make good grades and go to college. He'd like to go into business.

"I still get caught up in what people are thinking, but I have the strength to be my own person,' he says. "I'm not getting bogged down with the present. I can think to the future.'

• **Caption:** Photos: 1. During a group session at the Straight treatment program, David and other teens try to get the attention of counselors so they can tell their stories. Earning recognition from their peers is key to overcoming drug and alcohol addiction, according to Straight's philosophy. 2. uncaptioned 3. After describing his life on drugs in front of an audience of Straight families, David (upper left) is congratulated by a fellow participant. 4. Davids responsibilities in Straight include supervising newcomers, whose freedom is restricted. He stands guard at the door (lower left) while other boys, carrying their toothbrushes and study materials, prepare to leave the Straight building. 5. At home, David and his mother Debbie, (above) talk over the day's problems and the next day's goals. (All photos: DMN - Jan Sonnenmair) ; **LOCATION:** 1. - 5. NR.

• *Series:* THE TEEN SURVEY

• *Index terms:* PROFILE

• *Record:* DAL252648

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