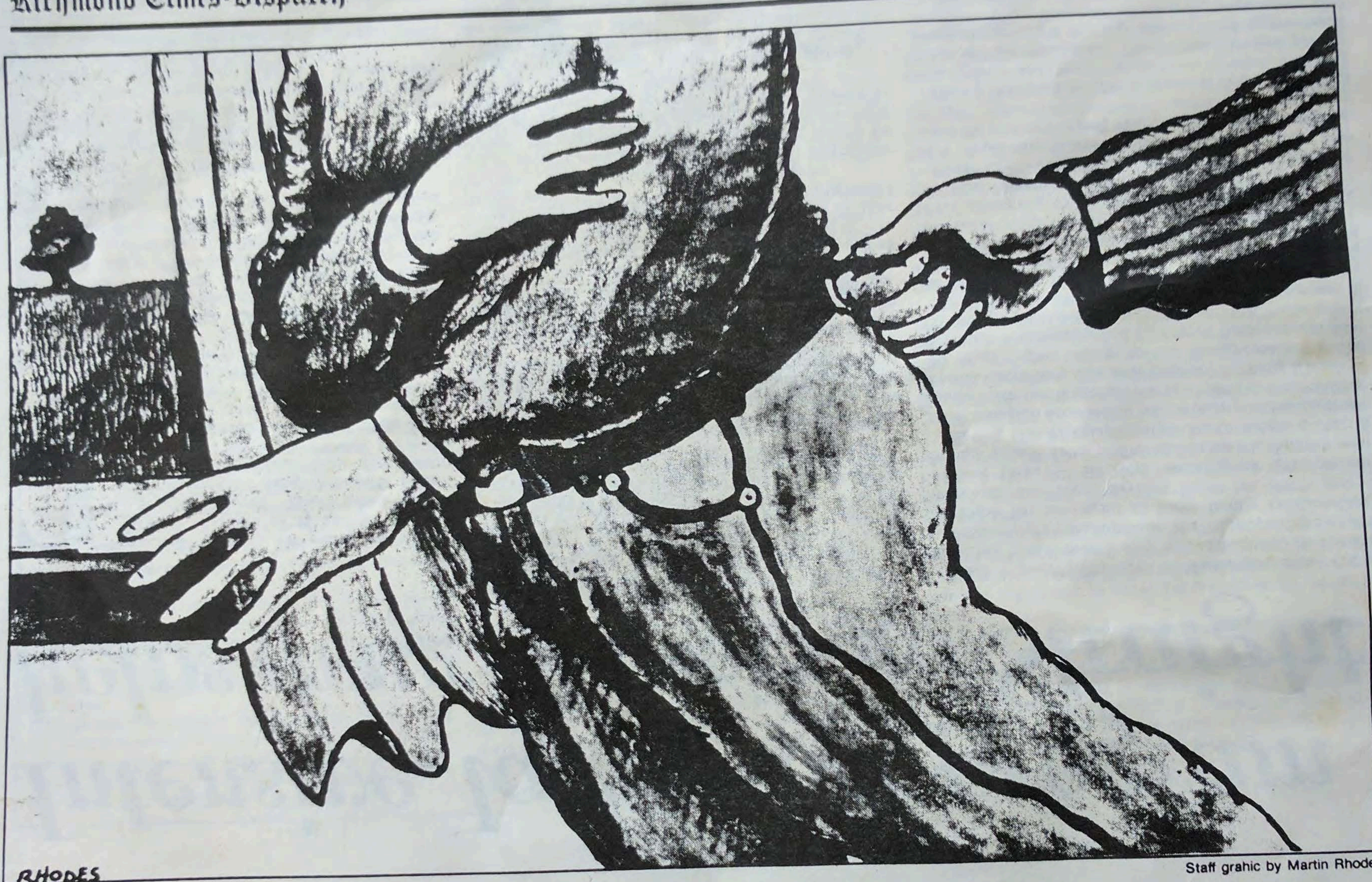


STRAIGHT

Richmond Times-Dispatch

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RHODES

Staff graphic by Martin Rhodes

Straight, Inc. • P.O. Box 792 • 5515 Backlick Road • Springfield, VA 22151 • (703) 642-1980
A family oriented treatment program for drug using young people and their families.

Intensive, last-resort program helps drug abusers go Straight

By Joy Winstead
Times-Dispatch staff writer

They sat in rows, 200 young people between the ages of 12 and 21, staring straight ahead. Their faces were scrubbed, their pants and shirts clean, their hairstyles neat, their eyes clear. They were singing.

They stirred feelings of pride that America's torch would pass to such a generation.

Then the singing stopped and the litany began. The first boy stood up and took the microphone.

"My name is . . . I'm 16 years old. I've been here two weeks. I started using drugs when I was 12. The drugs I've tried are pot, alcohol, speed, LSD, coke, hash, ludes, prescriptions . . ." The list reached 18. He talked a moment about his past and his goals and sat down.

The next scrubbed, neat, clear-eyed boy stood up and repeated the litany. The names and ages changed but little else. He had tried marijuana at 11; his list of drugs totaled 14.

The microphone continued down the boys' rows, stopping here, skipping there. The recitation came first from newcomers, then from veterans.

Then the procedure was repeated for the girls' section.

Facing the two groups, much like an opposing team, were parents, guardians and siblings of the substance abusers, plus a few visitors.

This was the Friday night open meeting in Springfield of Straight Inc.

Straight is different from other substance abuse programs, according to Richmond families in the program, because it relies heavily on peer pressure to change what has become a way of life for many young people.

If negative peer pressure led them into drugs, then

positive peer pressure can lead them out, they theorize. The "druggies," the term used by substance abusers at Straight, can't say to staff members, "You don't know what it's like." They do. Most junior staff members at Straight came to the center for help, graduated from the program and then were trained by adult professionals on the staff to be counselors. A druggie finds it hard to "con" a former druggie, they say.

Straight is long-term, non-institutional treatment that requires commitment from the whole family. There is no dropping off the youngster for a month and then picking up a drug-free youth. The average client is enrolled for a year.

For Richmonders, this means a twice weekly trip to Springfield for counseling during the first phase of the program. There are groups for parents and for siblings.

A major link in the rehabilitation chain is the host family, particularly for out-of-town participants such as those from Richmond. When a drug abuser signs into Straight, he or she is placed in the "host" home of another Straight youth, called an "oldcomer," who has progressed far enough in the program to help a newcomer.

A newcomer must earn every privilege. As a symbolic gesture, the oldcomer holds the newcomer's belt as he moves about the building or grounds. Until the new client begins to respond and participate, he is not allowed to speak or move without supervision.

The Straight program is divided into five phases:

Phase one — The participant works on himself — developing honesty about his past, his thoughts, his feelings and how he sees the world. The host parent drives the newcomer to the center by 9 a.m. and picks him up at 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday. On Sundays he stays seven hours at the center. Minimum time in phase one is 14 days, but some youths stay in the first phase as long as one year.

Phase two — A youth from the Washington area returns home but Richmonders stay with a host family for duration of their rehabilitation. His hours at the center are the same but he begins to build family relationships. Minimum time: seven days.

Phase three — He adds working on achievement through school or a job to understanding himself and improving family relationships. Richmonders enroll in the Washington area school where their host family lives. Youths from the Washington area return to their regular schools where they face peer pressure from old friends "do drugs" again. All go to the Straight center in the afternoon and evening and all day on Saturday and Sunday. Minimum time: seven days.

Phase four — Withdrawal from active involvement in the Straight program begins. The youth comes to the center after school three times a week and one or two weekend days. He works on constructive use of leisure time and friendships. With written permission, he may participate in recreational activities with the family or friends. Minimum time: 90 days.

Phase five — Youths go to the center three days a week to work on personal freedom and helping others. They assist the staff in working with the group. Minimum time: 60 days.

Each participant decides when he is ready to move to the next phase change and then his group votes on whether he can move up. Throughout the five phases, Straight participants are involved in "rap therapy" led by two staff members. Topics may involve the group working together on one theme or working individually on different therapeutic tasks.

For example, a past-present-future rap goes from childhood to present to goals. A confrontation rap works on honesty and complying with rules, giving strong feedback. Continued on page 5, col. 1

Families part of Straight treatment

By Joy Winstead
Times-Dispatch staff writer

On an unseasonably warm winter day, smiling children were riding bikes along the county roads in the suburbs of Richmond. Parents were raking leaves or watching football games. It was a bit of Norman Rockwell Americana, 1980s' version.

But behind the front doors of two of those neat homes, carefully set midst trees and shrubs, were families in pain — pain caused by the agony of children on drugs, pain so great that they turned to the somewhat unconventional treatment of the Straight Inc. program in northern Virginia.

In the early stages of treatment, Straight can require parents to travel twice a week to Springfield, the nearest Straight center. It means involving the whole family — the "druggie," both parents and siblings — in a program that often pushes financial and physical resources to the limit for a year, sometimes more.

For two Richmond families, Straight also means a lifeline from the maelstrom of drug abuse to wholesome family living.

Family A ended at Straight via a circuitous route after years of school counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric hospitals, drug rehabilitation programs, halfway houses and juvenile detention centers. Family B went to Straight much earlier in the scenario.

To protect the younger children in the family from the taunts of others, the two families agreed to tell their stories in print if their names were not used. (The letters assigned to distinguish one family from the other have no significance.)

FAMILY

A

The cast of Family A: father, five years of college, a transportation manager; mother, one year of college, a part-time secretary; three daughters, 17, 14, 13.

The story of their involvement with the oldest daughter's abuse of drugs, including alcohol, was prefaced by a backward look at her childhood.

At 9, the family was living in the Deep South. Their daughter was picked for a program for exceptional children, a choice they believed due to her high I.Q. and good, but not exceptional, grades. In retrospect, Mrs. A doubts that the assignment was based simply on intellectual potential.

"She brought home stories of strange behavior of the other kids," the mother said, "and I began to wonder if she was lumped in with kids who were behavior problems."

The family moved to Europe. By sixth grade, the oldest daughter was burying herself in library books, reading three or four per night.

Already problems were developing. She was attracted, according to her father, to older, "wild kids." Because she was big for her age and highly intelligent, she could bridge the gap sufficiently to be accepted by the older group.

Still, her parents believed she was simply a headstrong child who needed a highly structured life and a lot of challenge. She would not, her mother said, "stick to something" so her parents insisted that any new activity had to be pursued for at least one year. She had one year each of piano, violin, gymnastics and dance.

When the family moved to their present home five years ago, they had no inkling that their oldest daughter had started experimenting with marijuana and alcohol at the age of 12, while they were still living in Europe.

At 14, her parents found her behavior fluctuating wildly. She would swing from sensitive, caring daughter to cursing and throwing things at her younger sisters.

Late one August night, when they thought their daughter was watching TV in the basement, they received a call from an acquaintance at a nearby convenience store telling them that the daughter had just left with a boy. They went to the basement and found it

Continued on page 4, col. 1

FAMILY

B

The cast of Family B: father, master's degree, works in sales; mother, two years of college, a housewife, a recovering alcoholic; two sons, 17 and 10.

As a child, the 17-year-old had two problems, according to his parents. He was overweight and he tried too hard to win his playmates' approval, usually by giving them treats.

The family moved frequently because of the father's work. By the time the older son reached his teens, he had developed what his parents now call undesirable friends and a "druggie type" appearance.

"He had long hair, he was sloppily dressed and he wore rock concert T-shirts," the mother said. "He was always carrying a radio around and listening to it. He wouldn't look you in the eye and talk to you."

At this stage, the parents presumed that he had tried marijuana and beer but were not aware of his deeper involvement with the drug scene.

Academically? "Just awful," the father replied. The son had to repeat the ninth grade and his parents felt they were working harder than the son. They made him take an assignment sheet every day to every teacher and saw to it that every assignment was done. If the son failed to carry out the instructions, he was grounded.

"We felt like we were in prison," the mother said.

The first hint of violence came when he was 15. As punishment, the parents denied the son permission to attend a rock concert and he went on a slamming kicking, screaming spree throughout the house that shocked them.

When the son was laid off from his first summer job he was vague about the reasons. The parents did not press for an explanation. The focus of the son's life that summer was going to meet his friends down by the river.

The parents were convinced the son was using drugs but they had no proof.

The son's appetite declined. One morning after school had opened in the fall, he refused to eat breakfast.

"He got mad and I got madder," the mother recalled. "Suddenly, I thought, he's not eating because it's easier to get high on an empty stomach."

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Family A

Continued from page 3

empty. Her father located her partying at the home of a girl friend whose parents were away.

"They were using drugs then but we didn't know it," the father said.

By October the mother was convinced that her daughter was using marijuana and hanging out with teen-agers on drugs because of the way she dressed. Her grades slid to D's and F's with an occasional B.

Several incidents in December led the mother to search her daughter's room for a diary. She found it under the mattress; it went back 1½ years.

"The handwriting was almost unreadable," the mother said. "Some of it was bleak, despairing, Satanic, pornographic, druggie slang. There were references to black tabs, LSD — in the margin it showed how many."

The latest entry showed five LSD hits in one school day.

"I was shocked, horrified," the mother said. "I screamed and screamed. It was real, horrifying. I called my husband's office and told him he had to come home right away. I never had the stomach to read all of it. He called the county juvenile office and told them we needed an assessment of our kid done immediately."

The rounds of seeking professional help began.

"Counseling isn't always the answer," the father said. "They would sit, listen and write reports. Just a sounding board. It doesn't make changes. They don't give you the information you need to make changes."

After Christmas, their daughter ran away. She was gone three days. They placed her in a psychiatric hospital where the professionals prescribed long-term behavior modification. After five months of hospitalization, she was placed in a home similar to a halfway house.

She began hitching rides home.

"She would beg us to take her back [home] and it was hard not to," the mother said, but the parents relied on professional advice.

Life got worse.

Attempted suicide. More running away. A stolen car. Back to the psychiatric hospital. Court appearances. Detention centers.

By November of 1982, almost a year after reading the diary, the parents decided to give their daughter another chance at living at home. There would be a six-month trial period.

The first week she started skipping classes. Her parents did not know because she went to school in the morning and came home in the afternoon on a regular schedule. She began to associate with women who had reputations as lesbians.

The secret was soon out because the parents tapped the daughter's telephone. A visit to school revealed the absenteeism and forged excuses.

The parents tried sending her to live with her grandmother in another state. She came back in six weeks to resume her old way of life, hanging out with her lesbian friends.

Through a mother in a "Tough Love" group for parents in the Richmond area, they heard about Straight. They felt they had tried everything else. They were desperate.

They phoned the daughter, now living with a couple in the Fan, and asked if she would like to look at a school in Northern Virginia. Just before she was guided toward Straight's Intake Room, she realized she was at another drug rehabilitation institution.

"It took three hours for kids just like herself to convince her to sign herself in," the mother said. When the parents were admitted to the Intake Room, they could see that the daughter had been crying. They hugged her, told her they loved her



Boys sit together, opposite parents in open meeting

and would see her in a few days. It was November.

It took one month for the daughter to earn the "privilege" of talking to her parents for five minutes in order to "make amends." By March she had reached phase two of the program and her parents could visit her at the host family's home or at a motel.

Not all of the daughter's days at Straight have been forward moves. When she reached phase three and was back in school, she ran away. But she returned to Straight and started over again in phase one.

Easily overlooked in the tug of war between parents and a daughter or son on drugs are the effects of the turmoil on other children in the family.

In the early stages, the daughter's two younger sisters refused to believe that the oldest sister was a substance abuser.

"I thought they made it up," said one younger sister. "We three were like a team . . . I thought Mom and Dad should just leave her alone. I

never thought she was an addict or anything."

As weeks stretched into agonizing months, the two younger girls no longer could deny the facts. During her second hospitalization, the oldest sister told them, "Don't screw up your life like I have. Drugs will only hurt you."

The younger girls readily admit that they resent the required trips to Straight because "we miss out on a lot of things here." After the open meeting, there are group sessions for siblings ranging from young children to those in their 20s. There they found that "other people went through what we did — we thought we were outsiders."

The father nodded his head.

"If people are willing to give up on kids, they can," he said, "but Straight has given us a ray of hope."

At this time, the oldest daughter is living with a host family and attending high school in the Washington area. Her grade point average is 3.5. She has been selected by Straight's adult professionals as a junior staff trainee.

Family B

Continued from page 3

The son had to be at the bus stop at 6:50 a.m. At 7 a.m. the mother called the vice principal and told him that she wanted her son watched to see if he left school or was using drugs on school property. That morning a group of students were caught smoking pot at the edge of the woods near school.

Their son was not actually caught with pot in his hand and he told his parents he had been smoking cigarettes. The parents described his eyes as red-rimmed, his behavior "crazy." School officials said he could finish the day but then would be suspended for one week.

"He came home about 2 or 2:15 and obviously he was high," the mother said. "I had never seen him like this before. I was trying to calm down . . . trying to control my voice. I confronted him. 'Just look at you!' He said he just need a little Visine. Murine. Visine. That's a good clue. They like to blame it [red eyes] on the pool."

The son had been seeing a psychologist for three months at this point. In a couple of family sessions, he had told his parents he occasionally used marijuana.

Parents seek support

After the suspension from school, he was required to undergo a drug

treatment program. His parents turned to a local Tough Love group for support.

"Everything was on a contractual basis," the father said. "We spelled out everything and the consequences for it. We were foreseeing the worst possible scenario."

The Tough Love contract had shock value, the father said, and it "let him know we were serious." He was forbidden contact with those his parents considered to be "druggie friends."

They heard about Straight through parents in the Tough Love group and drove to Springfield to attend an open meeting last January.

"The minute we saw it, we knew that was what he needed," the father said. "His attitude had been a long time in coming. No four-week program was going to change that."

The son was "looking forward" to attending a one-month local drug rehabilitation program, they said, and was dismayed to hear he was going to Northern Virginia instead. They left him in the Intake Room with his duffel bag and waited until other youths

convinced him to sign himself in.

It took one month at Straight for the son to earn permission from staff and his group to talk to his parents.

"These kids are not in a psychiatric hospital," the father said. "They are in a day-to-day program run by kids, designed and run by families, run by people in it. They are living with families there. We stay with host families where our kids are."

After the son enrolled in Straight, they found out the extent of his drug use. He had tried pot, alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, over the counter and prescription drugs (anything he could find in a medicine cabinet). He even had tried to get high on inhalants for bronchitis.

When they thought their son was asleep in his room, he had been sneaking out, driving under the influence of drugs and without a driver's license. They were shocked to hear of the sexual activities of teens on drugs.

Son apologizes

The son has apologized to his little brother for his behavior when he was entrusted with baby-sitting. He had

sent the child to bed immediately on his parents' departure and threatened him with violence if he told their parents anything. The younger son became terrified of his brother.

The older son was in phase one for six months (minimum is two weeks) before his group decided he was ready for phase two. The parents feel that the Straight regulation of having an "oldcomer" hold onto a newcomer's belt loops during that first phase, has a humbling effect as well as preventing runaway attempts.

"It was a good four months before we saw a change," the father said. "We could see emotion in talking with us. He no longer was interested in being a tough guy, a cool guy. He was not so interested in covering things up. Once that shell is broken..."

When the son lived at home, he was always eager to go to school, the parents said, because drug dealers came to the bus stops and "kids on the buses were loaded with drugs to sell." Teenagers would take prescription and other medicines at random from home medicine cabinets and sell

them mixed without regard to what they were, the parents reported.

Straight principles

Two Straight principles stand out for Family B:

- Positive peer pressure on the "druggie" to reform.

- Involvement of the whole family, including siblings, in long-term therapy, usually a year or more.

"What's the point if you send a sick kid back to a sick home?" asked the mother. "It's a family disease. Irrational behavior has to become rational. When he comes home, I hope for honest, open communication instead of just stuffing our feelings — to learn to talk and act from the gut instead of intellectualizing everything."

In one year at Straight, the son climbed to the upper levels of phase four, slid back to three and is now starting over again in phase one — by vote of professional staff and his peer group.

Drug abusers learning to go Straight

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positive feedback to individuals. A fun rap may cover off-beat topics such as ghosts or UFOs.

Morning rap for those in first and second phase covers the basic foundation tools of the program. After lunch, separate boys' and girls' sessions tackle topics more related to male-female issues.

More oldcomers are involved in afternoon rap when higher phase members arrive from school or work. Specific issues are tackled such as responsibility, weaknesses and strengths. Confrontation increases.

Night rap features positive themes to end the day on an up note.

Open meetings for Straight clients and their families are held on Monday and Friday evenings. The number of meetings attended by the family depends upon the progress of the boy or

girl enrolled in the program.

No dating or emotional involvement with members of the opposite sex is allowed during the Straight program.

Graduation from Straight is followed by a six-month Aftercare program that also involves the family.

In Aftercare, the Straight graduate attends a series of classes dealing with the problems now being faced — relationships, dating, goal setting, relapse symptoms. Graduates go to two classes per week for the first three months, one class a week for the last three months. Parents are required to attend one class per month with their graduate.

Straight was founded in 1976 by a group of parents and businessmen in St. Petersburg, Fla. There are treatment centers there and in Atlanta and Cincinnati in addition to the Virginia

facility, which opened Oct. 28, 1982.

Nationally, Straight has collected a lot of praise for its work, including visits and accolades from Nancy Reagan, but it also has drawn harsh criticism.

In 1982, Fred Collins, now a 22-year-old industrial engineering student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, charged in a lawsuit that Straight Inc. held him against his will for more than four months in 1982. He said he did not have a drug problem. He won \$220,000 in damages.

According to news reports, a panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently upheld the award but Straight wants the full court to hear the case and it may appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The case attracted national television coverage and Collins was on "60 Minutes" and "20-20."

He was transferred from St. Petersburg, Fla., to Virginia when the Springfield facility opened and escaped during a visit to his parents' home in Fairfax County.

He also claims that Straight subjects its clients to mental and physical abuse. Straight supporters deny the charges.

Collins' legal battle alienated him from his parents and his brother, a high school student who graduated from Straight. At present, they are trying to rebuild a family relationship.

"In phase one the kids don't go home at night — they go to a host family — because they have abused the privilege of living with their parents," [redacted] said. "It's up to them to make a commitment to get straight."

'Druggie' tale told easily: Lesson is hard

By Joy Winstead
Times-Dispatch staff writer

"My parents brought me up to Straight. I don't know why I trusted them. Yeah, I do. I knew that I had to have something better. I knew I was going to die soon. I really did. Because I had nothing. . . I didn't want to face up to myself. . . to the terrible mess I had made of my life."

The 17-year-old girl, the oldest of Family A's three daughters, was home from Straight for a weekend. The recitation of her life story came easily. She had repeated it so many times to so many others — addicts and therapists, street people and judges, strangers and family members.

It was a story that started with marijuana and alcohol, continued into "hard" drugs, suicide attempts, running away, sexual promiscuity and crime. Before her parents hauled her off to Straight, she was convinced that she was gay.

In telling her story, she wants to communicate two messages.

To boys and girls contemplating drugs and alcohol: "It may look like fun at first, but it will kill you in the long run."

To parents of kids on drugs: "Never give up on your kids. They are like little kids crying out for attention and love. If you suspect your kids are on drugs, follow them, tap their phone, search their room, take them to a drug rehabilitation center for assessment. Don't ask them if they take drugs. We lie."

No child of the ghetto, she had grown up in a middle-class family, a bright, attractive little girl. The family moved a lot because of the father's work. When she was 12, the family returned to the United States from Europe, this time to Richmond. She didn't want to leave and her parents allowed her to stay with another family until the school year ended. It marked the beginning of a five-year slide.

The 16-year-old brother of her girl friend introduced her to pot.

"He was upstairs in their house in his room, playing old rock music and . . . telling stories about Woodstock and concerts and things," she recalled. "He asked me if I'd like to smoke pot with him and . . . I went ahead and I did it."

A couple of weeks later, just before joining her family in the United States, she went to a farewell picnic and tried alcohol. Before the picnic ended, she was very drunk.

"I did it basically because I didn't want to leave my friends," she said. "I was very angry with my family and I did not want to move back over here . . . At the same time I felt my family had deserted me when they left me overseas."

That summer, shortly after her arrival in Richmond, she got drunk on wine with two older teen-agers. She also began sneaking out at night "because I wanted to do something that my parents didn't know I was doing."

She started eighth grade and drinking bouts were a daily occurrence. She took alcohol from a supply her parents had brought back from Europe. They kept liquor

for guests, she said, and didn't notice the diminishing supply.

She had sexual relations for the first time with a 17-year-old boy, the brother of a girl friend, because "I was flattered that an older guy was paying me attention." The possibility of pregnancy "didn't enter my mind."

The summer before ninth grade, when she was 13, she began meeting older teen-agers at a place called "the lake." There she tried LSD for the first time. It became a weekend ritual.

To get money for LSD, she became a drug dealer, selling amphetamines. She also took "speed," four to six pills a day. She lost weight rapidly; slept little.

Her parents were ignorant of her substance abuse, she said, but they did not approve of her friends. By tenth grade, she was going out with young men in their 20s.

"I didn't think there was anything wrong with it," she said. "I thought it was cool. I was popular. A lot of guys liked me. By this time, I had gone to bed with a lot of guys."

At 14, she began to worry about getting pregnant and started taking birth control pills. During first semester of 10th grade she skipped about half of her classes and school officials accepted her forged notes.

"Every morning my druggie friends would pick me up," she said. "They'd bring the pot and I'd bring the wine and . . . we'd sit in the school parking lot before school and I'd go into school that way." She usually left school after home room and perhaps her first period class.

The confrontation with her parents came in December of 1981. She went to a rock concert in Hampton while her parents were out of state attending a relative's funeral. She took LSD and brought her friends home for a party.

When her parents returned, the deception was obvious and a family scene erupted. She ran away and ended up in a local hospital's drug rehabilitation unit for five months. She graduated from the chemical dependency program convinced that she did not want to "do drugs" again.

"I had tried to kill myself three times already in my past," she added, almost as an afterthought. Why? Depression, she replied.

Her therapist at the hospital had recommended a group home for long-term treatment. It was a decision marked by numerous runaway attempts.

She took her father's company car and drove it to another state to live

with two "druggie friends." The days passed with drugs, alcohol, sex.

"There I was, 15, a wanted felon." She sold the \$12,000 car for \$100 and a beat-up old truck.

Some sights were shocking, even for her. She saw old men, desperate for alcohol, drinking Lysol and shaking with DTs.

When police found her, she was furious, screaming and fighting.

"I was in jail two weeks in solitary confinement because there was no provision for juveniles," she said. "I really thought I was losing my mind . . . I was cold, I was just dirty, I was just like a rat or something. I just pictured myself as a rat, just really awful. It scares me now when I even think about it, that I was that type of person."

Extradited to Virginia, she was sent to a detention center. She slit her wrists and went back to the hospital where she had graduated from the chemical dependency program.

"I liked it there," she said. "I was safe from myself. I wasn't out in the real world. I could escape from reality anytime I wanted to."

After four months in the hospital, in November of '82, she went home on probation for six months.

She refrained from using drugs, went back to school and attended Alcoholics Anonymous regularly.

"In March I met — I feel very embarrassed saying this — this was really when I went the farthest down . . . I met this lady one time, she was 21 when I met her, she was a lesbian, homosexual, and I fell right into it."

When the teen-ager's mother found out, she reported a violation of the daughter's parole (skipping school) so the daughter would be sent to the detention center.

"She was trying to find any way to get me away from this lady," the teen-ager said. "My mom could see me going farther down."

When she got out of detention in

July, she went to another group home and resumed her relationship with the lesbian. They began drinking together.

"I got hooked into the excitement of it all," she said. "I was so rebellious toward society . . . I had found a new way that I could infuriate my parents, humiliate them." She adopted an the most extreme punk hairstyle, fashions and music.

One night, in tears, she called her dad and told him she had to get away. A grandparent, who lived in another state, offered to take her.

For six weeks, she abstained from drugs and alcohol and was making A's and B's in school. Then she started calling the lesbian who responded by calling her at her grandparent's home. They began writing every day.

"I would be like obsessed," she said. "She became a drug for me. My dependency instead of chemicals was this person."

"This one Christian guy was reaching out to me. He told me to turn my life over to God. . . I wanted to believe that like I really wanted some faith in my life. . . So I turned my life over to God one night and I accepted Christ

as my Savior. I remember I was so happy and was so proud of myself. I thought I can just leave her [the lesbian] behind me, I can just leave Richmond behind me, everything behind me. I'm away from it. I thought geographical escape would help me . . .

She took the bus to Richmond and went to live with a young couple in a small apartment in the Fan, caring for their baby, so both could work. He was an active alcoholic and "shot up sometimes," she said.

At 16, she was alienated from her family, a school dropout, back on alcohol and drugs, and dependent on the lesbian for money.

Unexpectedly, her parents called. Would she like to try a private school near Washington? She thought they were putting her in another psychiatric hospital. She agreed.

Exhausted, she slept all the way to Springfield.

"I went into what they call the Intake Room and three girls came in . . . They were [about my age]," she said. "We all started talking about when we did drugs . . . They were saying that they felt ashamed, that

they felt guilty. And I had just been out of rehabs [rehabilitation centers] and learned all you needed to learn about the intellectual part of the drug problem and chemical dependency, but I didn't know anything about feelings. I didn't know a damn thing about feelings."

They took down her list of drugs and problems with family, school, the law and friends. An intake coordinator and an executive staff member assessed her case and she signed herself into Straight.

In phase one she was in therapy 11 hours a day. An "oldcomer" — another girl about the same age who held onto her belt loops whenever she tried to move — and a host family were assigned to her. She did not smoke, wear makeup or jewelry, date, watch TV, listen to the radio or read.

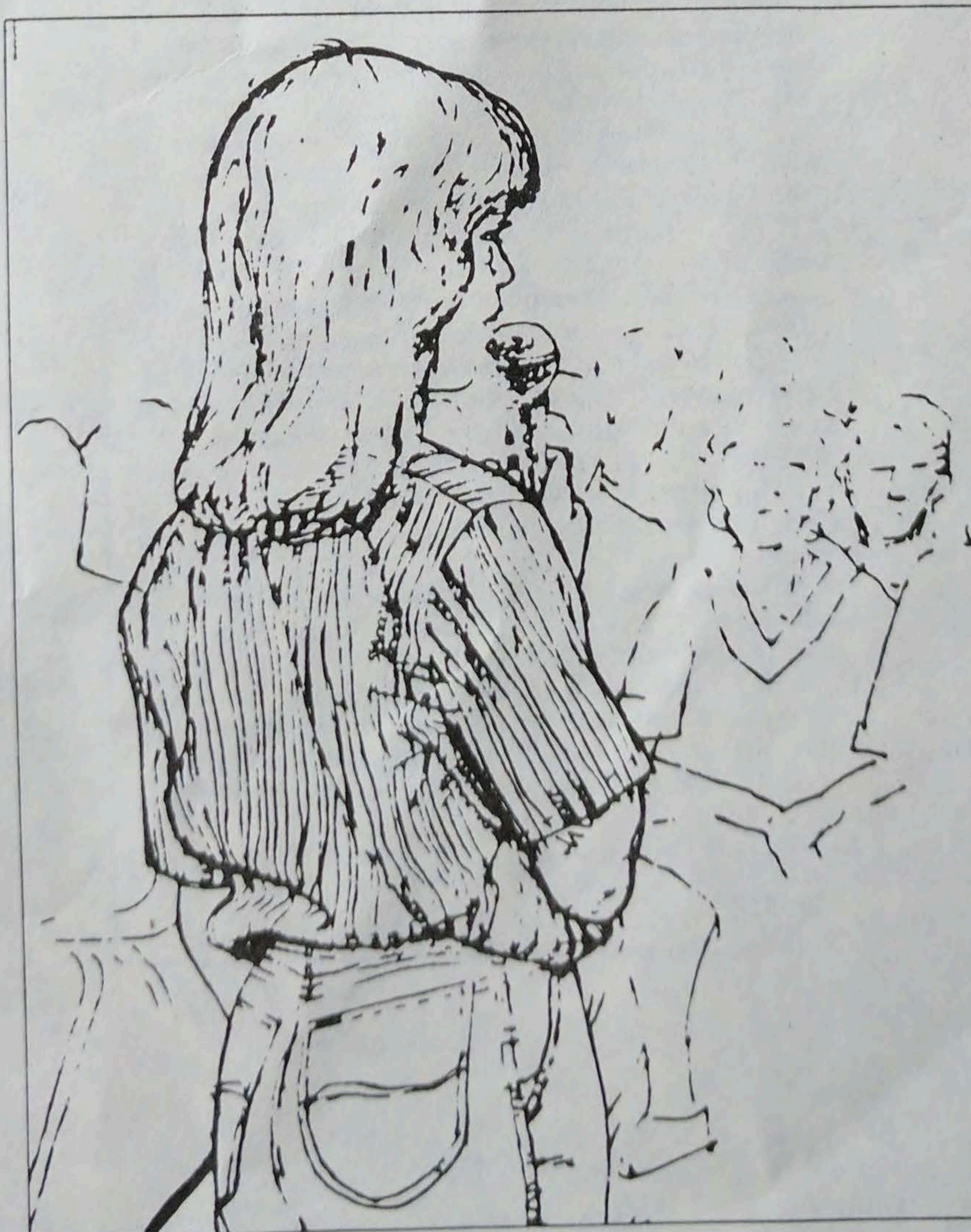
On her first day of summer school in the Washington area, she ran away. She believes that hospitalization for appendicitis triggered her old desire for drugs. She hitchhiked to Richmond and returned to the lesbian who responded by buying her clothes, food and cigarettes.

It was back to drugs and alcohol but not the gay life. Lesbianism no longer appealed to her. In an unexpected turn of events, the lesbian called her parents and offered to help get her back into Straight.

Her father and another adult hauled her bodily back to Straight. She describes herself as drunk, screaming and cursing when she reached Re-Intake.

"An executive staff member came in and I broke down crying," she said. "I didn't fit into the past. I had to choose — change or die. It still scares me sometimes. I know I'm worth more."

Phase one took 44 days. When she returned to a Washington area school, she made top grades. She signed up for staff training. By Thanksgiving she had reached fourth phase.



Telling their stories is part of Straight's program

STRAIGHT

STRAIGHT FACTS

Facts on Straight prepared by Straight Inc. of Greater Washington:

- Expenses are covered by client fees (65 percent) and private donations (35 percent). Some scholarship funds are available.

- Maximum fee is \$6,000. After phase one, a room and board for an out-of-town client is negotiated with the host family, usually \$100 to \$150 per month. Coverage by insurance companies varies.

- Youngsters needing detoxification are sent to a hospital first. About 2 percent fall into this category.

- Most clients are between the ages of 12 and 21; the average age is 17. Most started using drugs at 12.

- Sixty percent of program participants are boys.

- The average treatment cycle is one year. About 70 percent complete the program.

- All youths must voluntarily admit themselves and must be accompanied by an adult. If a youth under 18 wants to sign himself out, parents may choose to give temporary custody to Straight.

- The average client comes from a middle-class suburban home (60 percent of the families have incomes over \$40,000) and has an above-average I.Q.

- The average youth used drugs two years before parents became aware of it. During this time, 96 percent committed minor crimes; 68 percent, major crimes. Most were undetected.

- One in three participated, unsuccessfully, in other drug treatment programs; three of four participated in family counseling and/or psychiatric treatment.

- The average client used drugs four to seven years prior to entering treatment.

- The average graduate has been drug free for two years.

- The geographical distribution of the youths' home addresses is Virginia, 55 percent; Maryland and District of Columbia, 35 percent; non-local, 10 percent.

Mel J. Riddile, Ed.D., is program director. Straight's professional staff includes associate and assistant directors, a medical director, three counselors, a staff pediatrician and a family therapist. Other physicians are "on call."

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