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JERSEY PROGRAM HELPS TROUBLED TEEN-AGERS

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When she entered the seventh grade, Andrea M. was well behaved and had a close relationship with her family.

"Then everything changed," said her father. "She became antisocial and rebellious. Things got worse when she entered the eighth grade. She became sloppy and didn't want to have anything to do with us."

For the next three years, the family's life was in constant turmoil, the father said. There were fights between mother and daughter and three suicide attempts by Andrea.

The family tried a psychiatrist and sought help from various counseling groups. Then they learned about a new program in Hackensack, Kids of Bergen County.

Compulsive Disorders

The program, which was begun 16 months ago, diagnoses and treats adolescents with compulsive disorders. It is a private, nonprofit program for young people between the ages of 12 and 22 who abuse drugs and alcohol, have eating disorders - anorexia and bulimia - or suffer from behavioral problems.

Through the program the parents learned that Andrea, who had been misdiagnosed twice as being emotionally disturbed, had been abusing drugs and alcohol for several years.

"We never knew," the mother said. "There were no telltale signs. We never saw her high or drunk."

The program, which relies on the basic principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, is divided into five stages. During the first stage the newcomer is removed from his family environment and lives at the home of another adolescent with a similar problem who is further along in treatment.

Use of Peer Pressure

Dr. **Miller Newton**, a clinical psychologist and founder of the program, said that since most teen-agers get into trouble because of negative peer pressure, the group uses positive peer pressure as an integral part of the treatment.

A graduate of the program who is now on its staff, Steve, 23, recalled the first time he went home with someone further along in treatment. "His mom hugged me and said, 'Welcome,'" Steve recalled. "I was shocked. I watched their family interaction and it showed me that if you were straight, you could have fun."

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During this stage, the teen-agers are under intense supervision and are expected to learn to come to grips with their compulsion, Dr. **Newton** said. They are at the program's counseling center six days a week, 12 to 13 hours a day, going from one therapy group to another. Dr. **Newton** said the hours were long to keep the teen-agers busy. He said newcomers to the program were watched closely because about 30 percent are suicidal when they are admitted.

Return Home

As the treatment progresses, the teen-agers return home in an effort to begin to rebuild the family relationship. In the next stage they are allowed to take a newcomer into their home each night. And then they return to school or work to learn how to deal with negative peer pressure. They are expected to report to the facility after they get out of school or work.

"When I returned to school, I felt the old pressures of my 'druggie' friends, but I knew I had the program to back me up," said Danielle, 16, who is in the final stage of the program.

Near the end of the treatment, the teen-agers report to the facility less frequently and are expected to learn to manage their free time with family and friends who support their new drug-free life style, Dr. **Newton** said.

"I am able to relax with myself and others now," said Danielle, who started using drugs and alcohol when she was 11 years old.

In the last stage, the adolescents help the staff and train to become program counselors. They are also encouraged to join adult self-help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous.

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