

COUPLE STARTED KIDS PROGRAM TO HELP TREAT SON'S ADDICTION

Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT) - July 23, 1989

- Author/Byline: Lois M. Collins, Social Services Writer
- Edition: Metro
- Section: News
- Page: B13

They thought they were a model family: Miller and Ruth Ann Newton were both successful in the field of alcohol and drug abuse treatment. Their three children were bright, high achievers and apparently very happy. They were a "close family" that went to church every week together.

But life was not picture-perfect. Although the Newtons tried not to see the problem - their youngest child, 15-year-old Mark, was heavily addicted to drugs and alcohol, despite their own expertise with substance abuse.

Love was the fabric with which they carefully constructed their blinders, Newton said. "He was the least likely of our children to have this type of problem, we thought. And we didn't want to see it. We loved Mark and didn't want him to have a problem that frightening."

Even highly successful substance abuse programs weren't making much progress with adolescents. They "were lucky if 5 percent of the kids were sober after 15 months," Newton said.

In the climate of the mid-1970s, young drug abusers either died, went to jail or entered psychiatric treatment. The Newtons rejected those outcomes and set out to build another solution for Mark.

The result was KIDS of Bergen County Inc. The New Jersey clinic deals with all types of compulsive behavior, including substance abuse, eating disorders and some behavior disorders. Clients are generally 12 to 21 years old. Now, several years and two clinics later, the program has trained personnel and authorized a unit in Salt Lake City that opened July 18.

Utah parents of troubled children raised the money and furnished the building. The Rotary Club and others donated funds. And Newton's New Jersey staff provided intensive training.

The KIDS program is divided into five phases. In the first stage, youths who are further along in the program act as mentor-babysitters.

"In residential programs, friends smuggle things in. Well, we use kids to supervise because they know all the tricks. It's like the Alcoholics Anonymous sponsorship. But they're not just 'babysitters.' They've been there and can give understanding and support that no one else can."

During the first phase, the "new" kid spends the night in the home of an "oldcomer." Each morning, they return to the clinic. It's a day-care program with a host-home component.

In the second phase, the youth returns to his own home - and takes a new kid with him. "It's an important part of treatment to go from being cared for to caring for someone else," Newton said.

During the third phase, the youth returns to school or work or whatever comprises his normal routine - returning to the clinic immediately after each day. In the fourth stage, the youth can take a couple of days off from treatment each week. And in the final phase, the amount of time is cut down to a few hours.

The youth has been moved out of treatment gradually - and given the skills he will need to avoid old compulsive patterns, Newton said.

Record time to successfully complete the program was 8 months. The average is 15 months. No treatment fees are charged beyond 18 months, if it takes that long. And anyone who has left the program can come back if help is needed.

Things have gone well for Mark Newton. The youth whose behavior prompted the program will receive his degree in health psychology in August. He's one of thousands, his father said, who have "gotten back on track."

For information about KIDS of Salt Lake City, call intake coordinator Sue McCoy, 467-KIDS.

(additional information)

Early warning signs

Early stages of alcohol and drug addiction can be difficult for parents to recognize because they can be subtle and not unlike normal adolescent behavior. But when home ``turns into a battleground" and a youth develops ``behavioral acne," something has to be done, according to Miller Newton, director-clinical director of KIDS of Bergen County, Inc.

Some possible warning signs:

-Rebellion against church ("I'll go, but I won't enjoy it.")

-A youth has friends parents have never meet.

-A youth gives up peripheral activities and doesn't replace them with others.

-The family becomes a place of constant irritation and the youth does the same dumb things repeatedly, in spite of knowing consequences.

-A youth starts stealing from family members (usually small amounts that could be explained by carelessness).

-Siblings are afraid and avoid them.

- Caption: Photograph of Miller Newton

- Record: 8907250085

- Copyright: Copyright (c) 1989 Deseret News Publishing Company