

'WAY HOME' ISN'T EASY FOR YOUNG ADDICTS

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There's a "way back home" for thousands of youths addicted to drugs, a nationally recognized youth drug treatment authority says.

But Dr. Miller Newton, president and clinical director of Kids Centers of America Inc., Hackensack, N.J., said the path is not easy. It requires long hard work and family involvement. Family "do-it-yourself kits" to solve drug dependency usually do not work.

Newton was in Salt Lake City to describe the program for the Salt Lake Rotary Club, which is now heavily involved in starting a program in Utah.

In a Marriott Hotel luncheon meeting for Rotarians and their spouses, two 18-year-old Utahns who have been involved in a long treatment program in New Jersey gave poignant messages about their own long-standing involvement in drugs and how they have surmounted the problems.

"It's really exciting to go from the past of being a loser and now starting to actually gain something for myself and see myself becoming something," said Ross, of Davis County.

Becky, a Salt Lake County teen who said she had used cocaine and many other types of drugs for three years, choked back tears at times as she recalled family fights, all-night drinking parties and other drug-related problems.

A Christmas Eve graduate of the New Jersey "Kids" program, Becky told of reuniting with her family. "What was important was that we were all together as a family. I know that if I were still doing drugs I wouldn't have wanted to be with my family."

A board-certified medical psychotherapist, medical anthropologist and well-known author, Newton recounted how he first became involved in youth treatment programs 9 1/2 years ago. At the time he was head of the Florida Alcohol Coalition and his wife was a supervising counselor in a public-funded alcohol agency in Tampa.

They got started in what is now the "Kids" program after their own son, 14, became addicted to alcohol and other drugs. At first he resisted but was later placed in treatment.

The son, now 24, will graduate from college in June and has succeeded in business and other ways. Newton related how three of his son's friends were killed in a car-truck accident while driving and passing a marijuana joint back and forth. The youths were killed the day after the Newtons' son entered treatment.

"I have worked with 3,500 kids from 44 states, four Canadian provinces and three other foreign countries. Most of what I thought I knew about kids and drugs has been blown away years ago by thousands of hours of knocking heads with druggie kids, as they painfully struggle to get down to the bottom line on their addiction and as they even more painfully fight to put their lives back together so they can win, so they can live, literally, sober, abstinent and free again."

The speaker has written such books as "Not My Kid: A Parent's Guide to Kids and Drugs" and has been featured on many nationally televised programs.

"As I listened to kids . . . it became apparent that we weren't hearing about bad kids who started with serious psychological problems from infancy. What we were hearing were from a lot of good kids, from good families, who had made good grades, who had excelled in some activity or another and whose involvement with drugs represented losses. They lost the important dimensions and qualities of life because of their drug use," he said.

He said too many families think they can work the problem out within the family structure or in other ways with services such as outpatient counseling.

"Outpatient counseling usually doesn't work because the kid seeing a counselor is brain-impaired. The drugs distort the chemistry of the brain so the kid cannot think or feel straight, and therapy simply doesn't take. They (the kids) make promise after promise after promise."

The "Kids" program is a five-phase program, with the first phase requiring that the kids be "in our facility seven days a week all day."

"What we've done is harnessed the real power that we have to keep kids from getting high. The kids who are further along in treatment and are doing well supervise the new kids."

Newton said the program, which costs about half that of many other treatment facilities, requires a lot of involvement by families.

He said the program is not the solution for every youth and his or her family ``but it is the solution for an overwhelming number of kids."

``Kids" enjoys an 80 percent success rate among youths who completed the program four or five years ago. In addiction treatment the fifth year of sobriety is a critical time, Newton said.

Rotarians to give \$25,000 to drug program for teens

The Rotary Foundation board has voted to give \$25,000 to the ``Kids of Greater Salt Lake" drug-treatment program.

David L. Gillette, Salt Lake Rotary Club president, said the gift responds to ever-increasing problems of teen alcohol and other drug abuse.

Rotary officials said studies show that 7.5 percent - or more than 13,000 Utah children between the ages of 12 and 17 - have lost control of their lives because of chemical addiction. They said existing agencies and programs are only able to accommodate about 800 of 13,000-plus children.

A Rotary committee said 24 Utah families maintained they were were unable to find a drug-treatment program in the state that met their needs. The families enrolled 28 children in the New Jersey center.

Gillette said the \$25,000 is just part of the cost needed to start the Utah program.

- Caption: Photograph of Miller Newton

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