

## Teen peer pressure fights drug use in new program

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TAMPA - They were a normal suburban family, living what appeared to be a normal family life. Sharon Darrey would make her 15-year-old son breakfast and send him off to school.

Then, normalcy shattered.

"He'd go out and wait for the bus with friends and drink a six-pack of beer and do Quaaludes," she said. "Then they'd go to school, or not go to school."

Things got worse. "Once he said he found himself walking down a road at night, hypnotized by headlights," she said. "It's stories like that that make you know you need to get help."

For the Darreys, help meant commuting to Pinellas and Sarasota counties. But soon, non-profit, long-term treatment for teens will be available in Hillsborough County.

STEP, modeled on the successful Life Is For Everyone (LIFE) program in Osprey, hopes to open in or near Tampa by September, according to its president, Thomas Schultz, a Tampa accountant.

The program's name embodies the multistep process toward rehabilitation. Mrs. Darrey and her husband, Jeff, have already agreed to be officers.

"The need is so great," said Schultz, himself the father of teen-agers. "You can talk to any adolescent today in high school and even junior high, and they can point out who the druggies are.

"A lot of them are just super nice kids who got caught up in peer pressure and went the wrong way."

STEP officials in Tampa recently purchased the LIFE treatment model, a seven-step, scaled-down version of the highly successful Alcoholics Anonymous program, for use in Tampa. According to Nicholas Anthony of the state Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services office in Sarasota, LIFE has thrived there for nearly a decade and has had no complaints or legal problems.

The program relies heavily on teens who have moved successfully to the program's final phases to help those who have just begun. In the first phase, after 10 1/2 hours of daily sessions, the teen returns at night to the host home of a family with a teen in the later stages of treatment. Those in the later stages counsel beginners.

"Peer pressure got them into this," Schultz said. "Peer pressure can get them out."

Parents and siblings also are required to attend weekly meetings with other families as well as open meetings with their teen-ager.

Mrs. Darrey said the so-called "parent raps" helped her not to feel alone. "You're stunned and you're mortified there's so much out there, but at the same time you have someone to relate to," she said. "You're not the three-headed monster anymore."

STEP has been granted non-profit status and will be financed by community contributions and a one-time client fee of \$5,800, Schultz said. A site for the building or rented space, to which dormitories eventually will be added, has not yet been selected but will be at least 5,000 square feet. "We want something centrally located, something near the interstate system," Schultz said.

When it opens this fall, STEP will inherit 30 clients who are commuting from Hillsborough County to other programs. Others will come from community referrals.

Unlike many private treatment programs, STEP usually lasts six months to a year depending on the teen-ager, and the one-time fee is good for follow-up treatment as well, Schultz said.

Today, the Darreys' son is 22, married, working at his own business and straight.

"There's help out there," Mrs. Darrey said. "You've just got to go get it."

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