

'DEBT OF GRATITUDE' LEADS FATHER TO RUN CLINIC

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When his son began using drugs and alcohol seven years ago, Miller Newton hauled the 15-year-old to a drug treatment center that the father credits with saving the boy's life.

Now, Newton says, he's "paying a debt of gratitude."

Newton is president and executive director of Kids of Bergen County Inc., a non-profit treatment center that depends heavily on former teenage drug abusers to help their peers live without alcohol and drugs.

Two years ago last Saturday, the center took in its first young drug abuser. Today, 140 kids are being treated at the center.

About 600 people, including parents and siblings of teenagers at the center, attended an anniversary celebration at the center Friday night.

Newton is the author of *Not My Kid: A Parent's Guide to Kids and Drug Abuse*.

Not My Kid, a CBS television movie based on the book, was aired recently.

Newton said the movie was a fictionalized story based on an amalgam of teenagers the center has treated. The movie told the story of a girl who became heavily involved in drugs, shocking her parents and her sister.

Newton and wife Ruth Ann, the assistant director of the center, took their son Mark to a treatment center in Florida when they had a similar experience.

The Newtons were so pleased with the results that they created their own program in New Jersey at the urging of a New York businessman who heard Newton speak on drug abuse before sending his own son to the Florida center.

Newton said that most teenagers involved in drugs drink alcoholic beverages and smoke marijuana, and tend to use other drugs occasionally as "dessert."

"It's not a question of which drug they use, but how out of control the use is and how it affects their feelings and behavior," he said. "We take kids that are walking disaster areas."

"They have problems in school and at home, and they could have problems with the law. Some are runaways and kids who stay out all night and stuff like that."

"Most of them don't want to be here. Anyone who has problems goes through a massive denial - they blame someone else for their problems."

Those at the center range in age from 12 to 21, and most are from New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

The treatment program is modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous.

Participants who have completed the program or are nearing the end of treatment help counsel the newcomers.

"We really push the kids to be honest with themselves," Newton said. "When they get to that point, a light turns on and they starting getting the picture. That's the turning point in the treatment."

On Wednesday and Friday nights, siblings and parents of the participants attend center meetings to help family members talk about problems stemming from drug abuse.

The center also treats teenagers with eating disorders and other compulsive behavior.

Newton said that about 82 percent of the participants complete the program and that about 80 percent stay off drugs and alcohol.

The program takes from six to 18 months to complete, he said, and costs \$6,500. Newton said the center raises about 30 percent of its money in the community, and does not turn away teenagers because they cannot afford treatment.

With help from fund-raising events and volunteer work of parents, the center just completed a 6,000-square-foot meeting room, counseling offices, two infirmaries and additional bathrooms.

Newton said the additional space would allow the center to treat up to 300 teenagers.

An affiliated treatment center recently opened in El Paso, Texas, Newton said, and a third is to open in Los Angeles in the fall.

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