

DRUG CENTER WORKS ALL IN THE FAMILY

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This drug treatment facility isn't only for the drug user. In fact, one of the requirements is that the user's family be involved.

Straight Inc., a drug and alcohol treatment program that operates eight facilities in the country, including one each in Orlando and St. Petersburg, is geared toward patients ages 12 to 27. There's a branch in Tequesta.

Unlike many treatment programs, this one requires the parents of drug users to meet weekly to discuss problems they are having coping with their children's addictions.

"It's not just a matter of families dropping their children off and picking them up 12 months later," said Troy McDermott, a Straight admissions counselor in Orlando.

The program lasts about a year. During the first four months, the drug user is taught to acknowledge the effects that drugs have had on his life and to work on developing closer family relationships.

During this time, the child is taken out of school. "At this point, the children have been in real trouble. It would be too much pressure to leave them in school," said Janet Zeitler, family service manager of the program's Tequesta branch.

The local branch isn't a program facility but is used as a meeting place for families from Vero Beach to Boca Raton. Parents meet once a week to offer encouragement to each other. They also travel weekly to Orlando to see their children and take part in more counseling, Zeitler said.

"Miracles have happened for my family. The changes I've seen them make, I feel real good about," said Mary Stanley of Stuart, whose 17-year-old and 19-year-old sons are in the program.

"My little one was on crack. He did not know he was going (to the facility). . . . But now he and my other son bring back (to the program) two other kids and counsel them," Stanley said.

The final stages of the program prepare the drug user to return to school and deal with other outside influences so he can resist the temptation of drugs.

Finally, once the person has overcome his drug addiction, he is expected to help other children just beginning the program. Parents also must give something back; they host children in their homes who are starting the program.

"What's different is the peer counseling. They're given the opportunity to help the newer children overcome drugs. It's not just professionals working with the children," Zeitler said.

The cost of the program averages about \$11,000 a year. For more information call, 746-4709 or (800) 544-9479.

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