

STRAIGHT INC. RECRUITS PARENTS FOR DRUG WAR

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Urging Central Florida parents to arm themselves in the nation's war on drugs, an Orlando treatment program Monday announced an effort to help families recognize the signs of teen-age drug abuse.

Orlando Straight will introduce its Community Action Network to parents next month with a free prevention program that includes classes for parents, said Straight director Joel Jones.

Straight Inc. is a 10-year-old, intensive day treatment program for young people ages 12 to 21. Based in the St. Petersburg area, Straight also operates in Detroit, Dallas, Boston, Atlanta, Cincinnati and Arlington, Va.

Jones said the network manned by Straight staffers and trained volunteers is being started simultaneously in all eight cities.

"Despite national awareness of the drug problem, we still have a long way to go," said Jones, who held a news conference at Straight's headquarters on Silver Star Road.

"Parents are unaware of their child's drug use from 1 1/2 to 2 years. That's two years of not knowing and agony for families."

In addition to the training classes for parents, the network will offer free assessments for teen-agers suspected of drug use, a relapse prevention service for families that have completed any drug treatment program and a 24-hour crisis phone line -- (305) 628-3130.

Jones said the Community Awareness Network will train parents to spot such danger signals as suspension from school, sudden mood swings, withdrawal from the family and changes in friendships.

Jones also reported the results of an August survey of more than 800 Straight clients, including 60 in the Orlando program. Data compiled from the Orlando program closely paralleled national responses and showed that:

-- More than half the clients surveyed -- 56.4 percent -- had been introduced to drugs by friends, 21 percent by siblings and 8 percent by parents. Thirty-six percent had first used drugs in their home or a friend's home.

-- Forty percent had used drugs by age 12.

-- Seventy-four percent had used cocaine and 45 percent began using it at age 15 or younger.

-- Sixty-eight percent had stolen to get money for drugs, and more than half -- 54 percent -- had spent \$50 a week on drugs.

-- Ninety-six percent said they first tried marijuana and alcohol, which continued to be their drugs of choice.

-- Although 75 percent said they wanted help during their drug use, 66 percent said they had used drugs for a year or more before their parents became suspicious. In 80 percent of these cases, it was the mother who first identified the drug use.

Jones said the national survey also showed that 95 percent of the users had committed misdemeanors, 60 percent had committed felonies, 97 percent had shoplifted and 100 percent had been involved in vandalism.

Straight says it has treated 6,000 people nationwide and that 62 percent are drug-free one year after treatment. Jones said the 11 1/2-month treatment program costs about \$6,500.

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