

TROUBLED TEENS ASK MORE HELP FROM THE COMMUNITY

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- Author/Byline: By Ines Davis Parrish of The Sentinel Staff
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The admission by a 16-year-old girl that she was an alcoholic and had started drinking at age 9 was shocking yet familiar to the audience of professionals gathered to discuss how to help youngsters in trouble.

At the third meeting Tuesday of the Seminole Chemical Awareness Network, two key suggestions emerged on how to prevent adolescent alcoholism, chronic drug abuse, pregnancy and school dropouts:

- Find places for teens to go on a voluntary basis where they can talk freely about what's bothering them.
- Get parents involved in drug and sex awareness programs as much as possible.

Jamie, the 16-year-old, told the audience of mental health, school and drug treatment workers that she felt disconnected from her family, alone and unsure about herself. Drugs and alcohol offered relief from the confusion. When that no longer worked, the teen said she tried suicide more than once, then ran away.

Had there been a place for her to go and just talk about her problems, the teen said, she might not have gone through so much anguish.

In Seminole, there are only a few teen centers where young people can go to talk about themselves. The teen rap group at the Missing Children Center in Winter Springs was opened as a way to understand why so many teens run away, said founder Joan Hopkins.

"It's very, very important to listen to these kids . . . they need to know that they are liked, that they are good people," Hopkins said.

Sanford Mayor Bettye Smith said many problems teens have stem from a lack of self esteem or a clear-cut sense of values.

Another teen-ager involved in the drug treatment program, Straight Inc., said parents and teachers need to be more aggressive in helping youngsters. "It just takes common sense to see that a kid is on drugs, but too many people are lazy or unwilling to do something about it," said 17-year-old Casey.

The youth suggested that more effort should be directed at getting troubled kids into treatment programs. "For a teacher to not do something about a kid in trouble is like taking that kid's life."

Sex education, which is not offered in Seminole County schools except through a required life management skills class, is an area that generates concern and controversy.

Cathy Iverson, vice president of the Seminole County Right-to-Life group, said children need to learn that it's okay to "say no to sex as well as drugs."

An 18-year-old pregnant teen said more emphasis needs to be placed on the consequences of sex.

Iverson said that parents often need as much education about sex as teens do, and in some cases, more. It was generally agreed that if parents cannot pass on values to their children, it's tough for the school system or church to step in and play that role.

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DON'T JUST TALK ABOUT WINNING DRUG WAR

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The president and others in federal, state and local offices regularly exercise rhetoric favoring strong emphasis on drug prevention and treatment. It is obvious rhetoric will be the extent of their concern.

An example: In 1971 the Legislature passed a law providing for involuntary treatment of drug abusers but after 16 years has failed to provide money for it. A result: A recent applicant for help under this law was turned away at the Seminole County Courthouse without the opportunity of even filing a petition.

From 1979 through early January of this year, the circuit court helped parents get drug treatment for their children by providing office space for the Parent-to-Parent program. That program also assisted the juvenile court with information on available treatment programs for difficult cases.

Because of budgetary concerns, Parent-to-Parent had to leave the courthouse, and parents no longer have assistance for dealing with this problem.

County commissioners have refused repeatedly to provide money for any facility to be used by those unable to pay under the involuntary treatment law. The cities have also shrugged off any responsibilities for providing treatment.

And Straight Inc. and Young Recovery Inc., both well-recognized adolescent treatment programs, have been refused permitting and zoning approval in the county without any consideration of the special needs of our community.

It is time for federal, state and local politicians to stop the rhetoric and start allocating money for appropriate and necessary treatment, and begin encouraging treatment facilities to come into our community.

- Memo: Opinion My Word Norman Levin is an attorney in Longwood.

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DRUG ABUSE CENTER TO CONDUCT AUCTION

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Straight Inc. of Orlando will conduct its third annual "Bid for Straight" benefit auction at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Maitland Civic Center, 641 S. Maitland Ave. Proceeds will be used to provide free services for those who need help from Straight Inc. -- a family oriented treatment center for young drug abusers and their families. For details, call C. Andrew Cekun at 291-4357.

HOST FAMILIES NEEDED

WORLD ACADEMIC Holidays is looking for host families to house 25 French students, ages 15 to 20, who will be staying in Central Florida for a month. All students speak English with varying degrees of fluency. Prospective hosts can select the sex, age, smoking preference and degree of English fluency of the teen they are willing to have. The students have medical insurance and money to pay for the activities. For details, call Rosalyn Secor at 629-5564.

FORMER SMOKERS SUPPORT GROUP

THE AMERICAN Cancer Society's support group for former smokers will meet at 7 p.m. Monday in the organization's conference room, 1703 W. Colonial Drive, Orlando. The meeting is free and open to the public. For details, call 843-8680.

MODEL ROCKET DEMONSTRATION

THE ORANGE Rocketeers, in conjunction with the Civil Air Patrol, will sponsor a model rocketry demonstration at 10 a.m. Saturday at the Hobby Box, 403 S. Semoran Blvd., Orlando. During the demonstration, two new Estes rockets will be launched and free literature and catalogs will be given away. There also will be displays on unusual types of rockets. For details, call 859-8766.

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AUCTION BENEFITS TEEN DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAM

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A fund-raising auction for Straight Inc. raised \$10,000 for the Orlando drug treatment program for adolescents.

The money, raised recently at the Maitland Civic Center, will provide scholarships to help pay for treatment for youngsters from low-income families.

The treatment program costs \$20 a day for local clients and \$25 day for out-of-town clients. There are about 89 clients in treatment now, according to a Straight spokesperson. Of those, 15 are on scholarships.

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