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Son of prominent Valparaiso family speaks in favor of drug treatment center

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/236270,pathway.article>)

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BY TOM WYATT Post-Tribune

Hoping to locate an adolescent drug program in Porter County by August, Pathway Family Center officials and a few of its clients talked of their success stories at a Tuesday public forum.

Pathway's critics, a vocal minority from Virginia, Pennsylvania and Michigan, talked of Pathway's links to a controversial long-term rehabilitation program called Straight Inc.

But Pathway is not Straight, its supporters said.

"We started with the most successful aspects of Straight," said Pathway President and CEO Terri Nissley, whose daughter went through the Straight program before it folded in 1993.

Pathway was founded by Nissley in Southfield, Mich., near Detroit in 1993. Also with locations in Milford, Ohio, and Indianapolis, Pathway was first courted by the Community Action Drug Coalition in 2001.

Six years later, Pathway said it is ready to come to Porter County. The program treats addicted teenagers ages 13-18 in a family setting, not institutionalization.

And one of its supporters boasts one of Valparaiso's most identifiable names -- McGill.

Sean McGill, the 18-year-old son of Charlie and Heather McGill, graduated from the Pathway program in December after his life spiraled out of control because of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine.

"I felt comfortable when I was high," Sean McGill said. "If I was just myself, I didn't feel that was enough. Pathway was one of the best things I ever did in my life."

For the nine months Sean McGill spent in the program, his parents traveled to and from the facility twice a week. They hosted other adolescents on weekends when possible.

"I've seen such a change in my son, purely from a maturity standpoint," said Charlie McGill, Valparaiso Economic Development Commission director. "He's finally growing up."

The CADC has committed \$100,000 to bring Pathway to Porter County.

Local Pathway supporters have asked Porter County officials to contribute \$200,000 to meet the \$300,000 Pathway said it needs to begin hiring staff for the center.

In all, Nissley said it will take about \$1 million to make the program fully functional. After that, she said the agency will be self-supporting.

Nissley said the center will be located in Valparaiso, adding that Pathway is looking to partner with area mental healthcare providers.

The cost to the client family is \$60,000 a year, Nissley said, though 84 percent receive some form of financial aid.

Mann Spittler, president of the CADC, pleaded with those in attendance Tuesday to support Pathway.

"We have a chance to do something great, something grand and something wonderful," Spittler said. "Let's

grasp that opportunity."

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