

CENTER TO OFFER TREATMENT, ROTARY HELPS PANEL WITH DRUG PROGRAM

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The city's three Rotary Clubs last week launched a drive to raise \$350,000 to start an outpatient drug-treatment center for teenagers.

The Rotary Adolescent Treatment Center of Gaston County, its tentative name, stemmed from concern that drug and alcohol use has grown at an alarming rate, said Dr. Ellis Fisher, a Gastonia pediatrician who chaired the committee that made plans for the center.

“One of the primary reasons for this is the fact that at Straight in Atlanta (a drug-abuse program for teenagers), there were at one time over 30 young people from Gastonia enrolled in the program,” he said. “We knew we had a problem, numberwise, just from that one observation.”

The new center, set to open by late spring 1986, will incorporate some of the elements that have worked well for Straight Inc. and other treatment programs aimed at youths with drug and alcohol addiction, said Frank Edwards, who was appointed to serve as the center's director.

“It's kind of a blend of what the group considers the best of many different programs,” said Edwards, who once trained to become director of Straight Inc., but left to start Shepherd's Way, a Gastonia-based Christian treatment program.

The new program will use as its foundation a 12-step program similar to that used in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, Edwards said. It also incorporates large therapy groups, peer counseling and required family participation.

Edwards explained that large groups worked well for teenagers “as it is difficult to con large numbers of people and it also is effective in taking away much of the denial in adolescents.”

Peer counseling is another effective weapon against teenage substance abuse, he said. “At no time in our lives are peers more influential, thus this tool is very helpful in turning the tide in a positive direction.”

Family participation will be required, even though parents and brothers and sisters might not have caused a young person's drug use. He said chemical dependence becomes a disease that affects all family members and needs to be treated.

Another element of the program is one-on-one counseling with professional counselors who are recovering drug abusers.

As with Straight Inc., the clients of the new treatment center will stay in foster homes of Gaston County parents whose children have been through drug abuse treatment programs, Fisher said. “It keeps our costs at a lower level and makes it much more affordable to the family.”

Edwards contended that young people tend to be on better behavior in the homes of other people.

“In order to have a successful program, you have to have committed adults to provide foster homes,” he said. “We already have this commitment and we feel enthusiastic about the program.”

The expected cost for the program is \$3,000 for Gaston County residents and \$6,000 for others, Edwards said. He will direct a staff of seven counselors recruited from the area.

There won't be a full-time physician on the staff, Fisher said, but doctors will be retained on a consulting basis.

“We anticipate that up to 150 clients will be able to be served at one time,” Fisher said. “Half of the enrollees in the program will come from outside Gaston County.”

The \$350,000 will cover the cost of opening the center and the expenses of operating the first year, he said. “Beyond that, the facility would be self-supporting.”

While the members of the Breakfast Rotary Club, the Rotary Club of Gastonia and the East Gastonia Rotary Club are raising money for the center, they won't have control over its operation, Fisher said.

Organizers are seeking corporate gifts to help meet the goal. So far, they have pledges of \$70,000, half of which came from Ti-Caro Inc.

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