

## OFFICIALS STILL LOOKING FOR DRUG TREATMENT CENTER SITE

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A site for the Rotary Adolescent Treatment Center of Gaston County hasn't been selected, but officials say plans are falling into place and they hope to open within three months.

``Well, we're still looking at some properties in the Gastonia vicinity, but we just haven't found the right place,`` treatment center executive director Frank Edwards said Friday afternoon. Officials are looking for a Gastonia building of about 15,000 square feet with 200 parking spaces but are also considering building a facility if one is not soon found.

Three area Rotary Clubs - Gastonia Downtown, East and West - initiated the project last spring and have helped raise nearly \$350,000 from more than a dozen corporations and individuals to finance it. The center will aid teenagers with alcohol and other drug problems.

``It's an accepted fact there is a very definite shortage of treatment centers in this part of the country and we're trying to provide one that is affordable and available locally,`` Rotary member Plato Pearson Jr. said. ``We're simply trying to provide these kids a place where they can go for help. Now, the only alternatives to drug addiction is prison or death.``

The treatment center will be roughly patterned after Straight Inc., an Atlanta drug rehabilitation program. Edwards stressed that proven methods from other programs would also be used. The six- to eight-month treatment program would be primarily for young adults, aged 12 to 18. Although many details aren't worked out, Edwards offered this thumbnail sketch of the facility:

+The residential treatment center will be designed to handle up to 100 patients and would have a full-time staff of 12 for the first six months of operation. Expansion would be based on demand. Edwards said a profile of a typical patient might be a 16-year-old male who smokes pot, snorts cocaine, drinks alcohol and indulges in a variety of other drugs. He has also probably stolen from his family to help buy drugs.

+The treatment program would center around a 12-step process similar to that used in Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous.

``Basically the first phase of the process is very intense and is designed to separate the patient from the world of drugs. We do this with education. Drug addiction is the only disease that continually tells you it isn't a disease. The goal is to get them drug free and we do that by teaching them to recognize how they are blaming everyone else for their problems - teachers, parents and school - when the root problem is the drugs. We have to teach them they are responsible for being sober,`` Edwards said.

+The cost of the treatment program for a local family (within a 1 1/2 hour radius of Gastonia) would be between \$3500 and \$4,000. Families living outside of that area would be charged between \$7500 and \$8,000. Local families would be expected to provide host homes for clients. Some scholarships will be available as well as in-kind contributions. Edwards said many insurance companies are also beginning to cover a percentage of the expense.

+Board members haven't adopted firm eligibility standards for the program, but initially have said a small percentage of court referrals will be accepted. Most patients will be admitted on a voluntary basis, however.

``As we understand the law now, a parent or guardian can sign over a child to the program until age 18,`` Edwards said.

+Patients will be allowed to attend a local school. The center`s curriculum will include educational lectures, recreational programs, small discussion groups and classes on developing coping skills.

Edwards has operated Shepherd`s Way, a Christian outreach program for people with alcohol and other drug problems, for the last 3 1/2.

He and his wife Dotty live in Gastonia and have two teenage daughters  
psychology from Guilford College and a master of divinity degree from Quaker  
University`s Earlham College in Richmond, Ind.

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