

DRUG ABUSE: FINDING SOLUTIONS

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A RECENT article ``As help dwindles, heroin use explodes" laments the lack of publicly financed drug treatment for teens and the fact that teens are not hearing about the dangers of addiction from their peers. As the parent of a 20-year-old recovering addict, I would like to share solutions my family found.

First, state-financed treatment isn't the only option, or even the best for a given family. After two years of chaos at home, my husband and I committed our son to SAFE (Substance Abuse Family Education), a private program in Orlando. He was admitted immediately and that same night went home with a loving family, something very important to me. While he was working through SAFE's ``phases," the rest of our family participated in the sometimes-grueling family component of treatment.

Five months after completing the program - we were there 13 months - our son is doing fine, and our family is intact again. Yes, we had to pay what insurance wouldn't, though there is a foundation that provides needier families with grants and other help. But we, not the state, chose the program, and our ``investment" was certainly a spur to our commitment.

Peer testimony is an important deterrent to drug use, as a young person pointed out in your article. SAFE offers just such a tool to the community. For a phone call (422-SAFE), a school or organization can have clients and parents come and speak about their experiences. These kids report from the battle lines, and their information is crucial. And helping others helps them.

My family spent an arduous year dealing with drug abuse. But we gained confidence from facing this crisis, and we have our son back. I ask parents who balk at the cost of drug treatment to consider what they'd do if their child had cancer.

After years of heartbreak - if not immediately, as with the recent heroin deaths - drug addiction is finally terminal. I would rather pay for treatment than a funeral.

Mary Burns

LONGWOOD

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