

# The Seed blossomed, withered, died

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When the Seed closed up its Pinellas County operations and departed last week, it left behind hundreds of families who at one time had handed over their money, their energy and their hopes to Art Barker's program for "saving kids' lives."

Long before the program's end it had lost most of the Seed families who kept it going, and new ones weren't coming in anymore at the old rate of three or four a day. Some of the families just drifted away, satisfied that their children had been cured of drug use and bad attitudes or disappointed that the cure didn't last or never took.

OFFICIALS of the Seed have refused to comment at all on the Pinellas County closing, continuing the silence that marked its years here. But there are families that have known the Seed well.

The Warren Rose family, for example, felt "betrayed" by Seed founder and director Barker.

Rose, an attorney who put his three sons in the Pinellas and Broward Seeds, estimates that he spent \$4,000 to

\$5,000 on the program, not counting donations of free legal services and supplies and hours spent making speeches to raise money for the program. He is counting 48 foster children he fed and transported for a year and a half.

HIS WIFE Jean became an intake mother. She interviewed prospective Seedlings and their families, prepared food for the Seedlings, kept house for a large foster family and chauffeured her own and other people's children. Seedlings have to be driven everywhere they go because they are never permitted to be alone.

Timmie Rose became a staff member in March 1974 after he graduated from the program. He worked about 84 hours a week, he recalls, and took home \$65 every two weeks. He thought it was worth it.

The Roses believe the Seed "straightened out" their sons. They think their family has an "openness" they didn't have before the Seed.

But for the past year, the Roses have "felt very strongly that the Seed needs to be closed and Art Barker in no way have control over kids."

"SHEER GREED and a house built on falsehoods

killed the Seed," Rose said. "At one point it was worthwhile and it ceased to be worthwhile."

Like many other parents who were once devoted workers for the Seed, the Roses distinguish between Barker and the program.

"The program itself works and could work all over the country," Mrs. Rose said. "Art and Shelley (Barker's wife) and a couple of staff members were its real downfall. Art's money-happy and he's power-happy."

The Roses spoke scornfully of the rapidly increasing price of admission to the Seed, from \$100 in 1972 in Fort Lauderdale to \$1,000 or more this year. They say everything was donated and the only expenses were utilities and salaries.

IN EARLY 1974, Mrs. Rose said, the Seed began to demand "money on the line" before a teenager was admitted. She said those who couldn't pay were turned away.

But the Roses worry most about the way the Seed staff from Barker through the "senior staff," treated the Seedlings and their parents.

See SEED, 2-B

## Seed from 1-B

They recalled a dozen or more cases of children who couldn't take the pressure that is part of the treatment. The Roses said a foster parent once told the staff, "This boy is different" and the staff insisted, "They're all just druggies." Mrs. Rose said the boy tried to hang himself.

**SHE SAID** a girl who had a hysterectomy wanted to talk about it but the staff took it lightly and the girl had a mental breakdown.

The Roses also believe the Seed tried to keep children dependent on the program too long.

"They had Timmie believing he would be a staff member all his life," Rose said. "What happens when the Seed is out of Pinellas county and they're still running back to find out if they should inhale or exhale. Rehabilitation is not a life time deal. You're not back in society until you're back in society behaving like a normal teenager, calling your girlfriend."

**"YOU HAVE TO** sever a knot with the Seed. I'm worried about the ones who can't. . . A lot have come out so bitter and their parents are not able to help them."

The Roses have decided that untrained Seed staffers have too much power over the lives and emotions of Seedlings, including graduates who have not broken with the program.

Seed staffers, no older than the clients they treat, decide when the Seedlings are telling the truth and when they're not, whether they have drug attitudes or straight attitudes, whether they're "ready" to see their parents, go home, go to church, go to school or get a job.

**TIMMIE**, who had such power on a smaller scale, as a junior member of the staff, said the power was inevitably abused.

He said his friend Archie McCrimmon, who stayed in the Seed 18 months, was used as an "errand boy" by the Seed staff. Archie knew how to fix cars and make repairs and the staff used to call him off paid jobs to come to the Seed to fix something, Archie said. He was told he would go to jail if he didn't make it in the Seed and he believed it, until one day, in defiance of the Seed staff, he went to see his parole officer. She told him he could leave the Seed and he did.

**ARCHIE** and Timmie remember Seedlings who were forced to stand up in front of the whole group of Seedlings and listen to hours of abuse. The practice of "coming down on" Seedlings was part of the treatment but Archie and Timmie said it sometimes was done unfairly, on the whim of a staff member.

"The whole trick is to make you feel like the lowest scum of the earth," Archie said. "(In one case) I knew it was wrong. I wanted to stand up there and tell them they were all full of it but I didn't know my court order was phony."

(The court orders, which Rose said were often "phony" or not enforceable, were used to threaten Seedlings with jail if they did not cooperate with the Seed treatment.)

**TIMMIE** told of a 14-year-old girl who was forced to stand up in front of the group while other boys and girls called her "a slut and a whore."

"It made me sick," he said.

He did not like the way the young staffers were changed by the power they had. The could make other teenagers cry and beg to be left alone, feel proud and grateful or change their minds about things they had believed before.

"You had power over the group," he said about himself and other staff members. "You knew everybody looked up to you and if you said something, they had to do it. If I stayed, I would have become a snobbish little brat. I had an idea I could do what I wanted and I didn't have to listen to

anyone except people above me (in the seed hierarchy).

**"THERE WERE** times you would tell somebody to do something and they wouldn't. Right then you'd feel the power you had. You'd say, 'You better do it right now, or else.'"

Timmie said the staff showed very little respect for the parents and Mr. and Mrs. Rose were among those who agreed.

Mr. and Mrs. Rose give the Seed credit for helping their sons give up drugs and get on their feet as competent, independent young men. They believe that Timmie could have done it by himself but the other boys were in too much trouble to pull themselves out of it.

However, they think the program becomes dangerous when families stay with it too long. The Roses and Archie, who also says the Seed helped him, think the program has changed.

**THERE ARE** others who came to believe the Seed was a mistake from the start, and told their children they were sorry they got them involved.

One 16-year-old girl said she stayed in the woods near her home a week, unwilling to trust her mother again after she was forced into the Seed. Her mother says now, "It was a mistake." Her daughter is home, going to school, holding a job and living what appears to be a normal life.

She said her months in the Seed were so miserable that she tried to cut her wrists in the Seed bathroom.

"Being dead was about the best thing I could think of," she said. "I thought about how peaceful I'll be. There won't be no more Seed. I can't stand this anymore."

**SHE SAID** she hid a razor blade in her pants and took it out in the bathroom.

"I was trying to break the plastic part off and cutting my fingers and an oldcomer was standing outside the stall asking, 'What are you doing?' I cut half my wrist, the first

layer of my skin. It was not successful. I hadn't done it good enough.

"I told my oldcomer I cut my wrist on the zipper of my pants. . . The staff got it out of me finally. I was going to talk to my parents that night and the staff said, 'Don't tell you parents — you know you just did it for attention and you mom's gone through enough — you don't need to hurt her anymore.'"

**SHE AND** her best friend, also 16, say the purpose of the Seed is to take guilt off the parents for mistakes with their children.

Her friend Karen (not her real name) refused to stay in the program. When she and her mother left the Seed for the last time, she said her mother told her:

"I don't even want to talk to you. One thing they told me was I did all I could and none of it was my fault."

**KAREN** said the Seed forces children to get along with their parents. If anything goes wrong between the parents and their children, she said, the parents can just call the Seed and the Seed will take care of it by starting the children over. Starting over means going back to the first, hardest part of the program, when the Seedlings stay in foster homes.

Karen and her best friend, who had both used marijuana when they went into the Seed, say the program helped them in certain ways. They say they learned to understand themselves better.

Karen says she finds it easier now to say no to people who want her to do things she thinks won't be good for her.

**BUT THEY** both say they are still "confused." They say they find it harder to trust people, particularly boys, since it was drilled into them in the Seed that they have no real friends and "guys only want to use you."

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## Seed from 2-B

Karen and her friend believe they were hurt by the Seed and will be a long time recovering.

Other Pinellas families feel nothing but gratitude for the program and its director. They will not miss it because they don't need it anymore but they do regret that the Seed will not be available for other Pinellas teenagers in trouble with drugs.

**THE WALKER** family (not their real name) left the county soon after their daughter graduated from the Seed. Far from being adrift without the Seed, Carolyn got involved in extra-curricular activities in her new school, made a lot of friends who have "always been straight" and established a high B average.

Before the Seed, she had spent most of her spare time on the beach, smoked marijuana frequently and dated a man she and her mother now call "the creepiest excuse for a human being."

"He was a lot like Charles Manson," Carolyn said. "That's what I was headed to."

"I WAS SO depressed all the time and all I ever took was depressants," she said.

She doesn't use drugs anymore and she doesn't even know if other high school students use drugs.

"Drugs are no temptation at all," she said. "What I have now is so much better. It was such a waste of time . . . I have no idea (if drug use is widespread in the schools) because I'm not exposed to it."

"The Seed hit me in the right spot. I'm glad they got me in the Seed when they did. They saved me, as far as I'm concerned."

**SHE SAID** THE Seed made her self-confident and gave her the courage to stand up for what she believes in. The first test came when she left the Seed and went back to her old school. Other students taunted the Seedlings in the halls and on the school bus.

"I could not understand why they would want to hurt my feelings," she said. "They think you're feeling so superior because you won't talk to them. When you first go back you do not talk to anybody but after awhile, (when) you're ready to take care of yourself, you can."

Her six and a half months in the Seed were not miserable.

**AT THE END** of the first night, "they sang and said the Lord's Prayer and I felt so good."

"I saw all those happy, good-looking people and I decided to get like them quick."

It was quick, for her. In 17 days she was allowed to go home. The group never "came down" on her. She was determined to avoid that and made sure to "get straight" to prevent it. "I can recall quite a few that just could not make it," she said, wondering why they did not want to "get straight."

**EVERY SEED** family knows cases of former Seedlings who are back on drugs, in treatment in other programs, hospitalized, jailed or run away. Some former intake mothers estimate the success rate, by their standards, was 25 to 40 per cent.

But many Seed graduates, like Carolyn, seem to be making it very well on their own. Out of the "super-seedling stage," no longer dependent on the program, they are pursuing their ambitions without apparent difficulties. Even those who now hate the Seed often say they "learned more about themselves" in the program. Some admit the program brought them closer to their families.