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Parents at Odds Over Success of **Straight's** Therapy

BYLINE: By MOLLY MOORE, **Washington Post** Staff Writer

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The new "intakes" stand nervously before the sea of parents and peers in the **Straight** auditorium in St. Petersburg, Fla. They are druggies and alcoholics. They are bad kids and scared kids and confused kids.

The confessions pour out: the tales of cocaine, acid, pot, uppers, downers, vodka and gin. If they hold back, the crowd presses for more, and out come the gut-wrenching stories of shattered lives and devastated families.

In private sessions, the intensity creates a therapeutic pressure-cooker. Endless counseling and rap sessions. Monotonous meals. Constant confrontation, verbal poking and prodding. They are told how to dress, how to act and, frequently, how to think.

For some clients, the program works.

"My sons have changed from kids that I didn't ever really want to be around to kids I now can't wait to see," said William Burns of Burtonsville, who has enrolled two of his sons in the St. Petersburg chapter of **Straight**.

Other clients see different results.

"I think it's inhuman," said Patricia Wynne of Lebanon, Ohio, whose 13-year-old son was placed in the program two months ago by her ex-husband. "He's brainwashed. He's not even my son any more."

Burns and other parents who endorse **Straight** use almost reverent terms to describe its work. Mel Riddile, director of the soon-to-be-opened Washington chapter, says the program's results are sometimes "like a miracle."

Last summer Burns and his wife realized they had reached a dead end in trying to cure their sons' **drug** habits. The 17-year-old boy was using any **drugs** he could get his hands on--marijuana, PCP, LSD, hashish, opium--according to his father. His grades in school plunged from an A average to failing marks. His 15-year-old brother was breaking into houses to find the money to support a **drug** habit.

Then friends told the Burns parents about **Straight**. One day last July, Burns packed the older son in the car and told him the family was going to Disney World in Florida. Instead, Burns drove to the concrete headquarters of **Straight** in St. Petersburg. Hours later, the rebellious youth was enrolled in the program.

Two weeks later Burns loaded the younger son in the car for the 18-hour drive on the pretense of saying goodbye to the brother.

"He didn't realize he was there to say 'hello,' " said Burns.

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Although both youths are still several weeks away from leaving the program, Burns said, "They are the kids I knew before they got into **drugs**. . . . Both of the boys have thanked me" for putting them in **Straight**.

Patricia Wynne tells another story. She has hired an attorney to pull her 13-year-old son [REDACTED] out of the Cincinnati **Straight**. The youngster was put in the program by his father after repeated attempts to run away from home and indications that he was dabbling in **drugs**.

Wynne's attorney, Joanne Hash, said [REDACTED] gave the following description of the program during a court hearing last week:

"He had been in **Straight** 59 days. He had been subjected to counseling 12 hours a day in a windowless room. He had no outdoor exercise. His diet consisted of dry cereal and juice for breakfast, peanut butter and jelly for lunch with an apple or banana and chili for dinner most of the time. He was locked in a room every night. If it was necessary to get up to go to the bathroom he must wake an older or a more advanced **Straight** client to go with him."

Officials at **Straight** have little tolerance for any parents they consider uncooperative. John Emmonds of Clearwater, Fla., said one of his daughters was kicked out of the program because of arguments he had with officials concerning a second daughter who was in the program.

"They **Straight** officials wanted me to be more humble," said Emmonds. "Woe be it to the parent who offers criticism. It is much tougher on the kid and the parent than I thought it would be."

With a large percentage of dropouts and runaways from the program, **Straight** officials said they expect criticism from the families of youngsters who aren't successful in shaking their **drug** and alcohol habits. At the same time, critics admit they've witnessed instances where the program works.

"The parents who support **Straight** are just as convinced that it's right as I'm convinced that it's wrong," said Wynne.

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