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## We all must help keep children free of **drugs**

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A great deal of attention has been focused on the effectiveness of the current efforts to address adolescent **drug** use. The St. Petersburg Times recently published an editorial that cited some of our local efforts to combat this problem.

The two organizations mentioned were Operation PAR and BADD.

**Straight**, the family-oriented treatment program, somehow was not included. It is difficult to believe that **Straight**, the nation's largest adolescent treatment program and the one with an outstanding success rate, could be overlooked. **Straight** was founded in 1976 before most people were aware that the problem of adolescent **drug** use even existed.

The **Straight** program was started here in the Tampa Bay area by local individuals who cared about their children. In our area alone **Straight** has treated more than 1,000 chemically dependent young people.

Since it began, **Straight** has delivered more than 5,000 public presentations to teens, parents, judges and many others in the bay area in an effort to share with the community vital information on substance abuse.

In addition to this local effort, **Straight** has expanded to become a national organization with seven full-service treatment facilities across the country. We should be proud of the fact that a Tampa Bay area program not only has helped our own children choose a **drug**-free lifestyle but has been able to help families from Seattle to Miami.

The **Straight** program emphasizes community commitment to ending **drug** use. Community involvement is the key to delivering our young people from a **drug**-using environment to one that is **drug**-free. We can achieve this if each of us personally does our part to assure that the use of illegal **drugs** is not tolerated.

**Drug** use is an insidious disease that is communicated by families, friends and neighbors. Young people who use **drugs** now are the victims of the deadly **drug** culture and a threat to the other children that they seek to influence. Every day our children face peer pressure from **drug**-using youngsters who have themselves succumbed to the peer pressure of others. We also must remember that children who are dependent on **drugs** will influence others to join them in order to pay for their own **drug** habits.

Over the past decade, as crime increased and individuals within neighborhoods became outraged by the threat of robbery and vandalism, they took action and formed community crime watch organizations. Far more frightening to

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most families than any possible loss of property is the prospect of a son or daughter who is lost to **drugs**. But there still is no development of a neighborhood **drug** watch. I believe that this is largely due to denial by parents that there is a problem and not an indifference to that problem. We must overcome denial and openly face the reality of the dangers posed by **drug**-using adolescents.

Parents must take immediate action to get help for their **drug**-using children. In getting help for a youth who is on **drug**, we are offering a chance of recovery to one who has all but thrown away his or her young life through **drug** use. In addition to the changes this creates in the lives of these children and their families, we also have changed the way they interact with everyone they meet. In my own experience as a pediatrician, those children who have been **drug** dependent and now are **drug** free are the strongest of the anti-**drug** advocates. They are a testimony to adults and young people alike.

It probably is only human nature not to become "involved" until a particular problem affects a member of one's own family. My wife and I are fortunate not to have a **drug**-using child in our family, as are the majority of parents who will read this article. What an impact we would have if together each of us decided to really "get involved."

How can we become involved? Each of us must promote a no-tolerance approach to **drug** use in our community, our schools, our neighborhoods and our homes. We must resist efforts to legalize **drugs** as a solution to **drug** use. We must learn to identify substance abuse and help other parents both acknowledge and acquire help for their own youngsters who are in need. We should contact successful anti-**drug** programs such as **Straight**, Operation PAR and BADD to volunteer our time and offer our financial support.

Certainly we must ensure that our own children are given the tools to deal with the presence of **drugs** in our culture, but our responsibility does not end there. We must take responsibility for all of the children. We must view an individual child's **drug** use as a threat to everyone in the community. We would then, in fact, all win - the children, the parents, our schools and our neighborhoods - as we eradicate **drug** use among our children.

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