

STUDY SAYS DRUG USE STARTS AT YOUNG AGE

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ST. PETERSBURG -- Almost half of the clients surveyed at eight clinics of Straight Inc. last Wednesday said they first used drugs before the age of 12, and 63 percent of those surveyed had used cocaine.

The survey covered 800 clients in the St. Petersburg-based nationally known drug treatment program, and they ranged in age from 12 to 21.

Randy Ratliff, program director of Straight in St. Petersburg, released details of the survey Monday, the day after President and Mrs. Reagan announced a national crusade against drug abuse.

He said the survey revealed 70 percent of the youths had been introduced to drugs by friends, 65 percent said their parents were not suspicious until more than a year after they started using drugs, 79 percent had been suspended from school and 25 percent had been expelled from school.

Ratliff said the survey was conducted to help determine the trends and patterns of drug use among the young people being treated.

He also announced Straight is planning a program called Community Action Network (CAN), in which Straight volunteers will try to help families and community groups become more aware of drug abuse problems and how to prevent them.

He said CAN is an expansion of existing services, including helping young people deal with peer pressure and counseling families of youths with drug problems.

Mary Ann Andrews, director of community relations for Straight's office in Hillsborough County, said schools, churches, parent groups and other organizations can take advantage of the CAN program.

Area schools have begun taking steps to combat drug use among young people, and Monday informational fliers were distributed at Pinellas County schools warning the county's 90,000 students that crack, a concentrated form of cocaine that is smoked, is highly addictive.

- Memo: THE STATE

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