

# St. Petersburg Times

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## A reader challenges Straight Inc. claims

Editor: I am, quite frankly, amazed that Straight Inc. receives federal money and the support (in the form of a favorable news article, March 7) of *The St. Petersburg Times*.

Straight Inc. staffed by former **Seed** inmates, promises to turn out kids who have had their drug habits kicked for them.

Hey, presto! No more drugs, no more druggie friends, no more embarrassment to the family.

"Devotion to schoolwork — "a traditional goal-oriented life" — these things are terrific, but what costs

must be paid?

Remember, above all else, that Straight Inc. operates as a money-making project. Behavior modification is a valuable tool when placed in the hands of qualified people with a sense of ethics.

People like this do not run Straight Inc. No, these people are carnival hawkers who wave their miraculous "cure" rate statistics around, gratefully collect their fees for treatment, and proceed to alter the young drug user's habits in the quickest, simplest fashion possible, without due regard for unique elements in the drug user's environment or psycho-

logical makeup which might complicate matters.

Their solution is indeed incredible — "one treatment cures all."

All I know of psychology suggests that submerging a young person in any environment where he or she is vulnerable to intense, consistent pressure to conform, will not generally help that person become more self-reliant or responsible.

In good conscience, I could not commit anyone to a program which ruthlessly programs people according to inflexible orthodoxies established by one man (James Hartz) who sits above everything, smiling, as benefi-

cent appearing as God — or Big Brother.

I feel very strongly that civil rights are currently being violated by Straight Inc. and its formal and informal agents. The courts may have the right to commit people to involuntary treatment programs, but it is my belief that this right should not allow involuntary commitment to programs which exercise dangerous methods of behavior modification — and I would include brainwashing among these.

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