

The straight and narrow path

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I would like to respond to Dan Barry's article, "Getting straight" (April 15). Six months ago, we made the most difficult decision we ever had to make: To admit our son, 16, into drug treatment. After careful study and talking to several people, we chose STRAIGHT as the program we thought would meet our needs. We have not regretted our decision.

Mr. Barry seems to have a problem with the way STRAIGHT is run, but it is quite evident that Mr. Barry does not have to live with a druggie kid. Our son had made our lives unbearable, and since his admission, we now understand why: His drugs of choice had become pot, alcohol, LSD, PCP, mescaline, inhalants, prescriptions, cocaine and free-base cocaine. Lest you think that my son was your stereotypical "scum-of-the-earth" drug addict, he was an honor student in accelerated classes, a varsity soccer player who also played basketball and baseball and participated in CYO - until drugs. Then his life and ours started to become a living hell.

I had two cousins who graduated from West Point. During their "plebe" year they had their hair cut very short, ate "square" meals, stood at constant attention, saluted upperclassmen at every turn, asked permission for everything, etc. And this was called "teaching discipline, respect, responsibility and character building." Why is it that when applied to an out-of-control druggie kid it is considered "abuse"? Am I missing the point, or is Mr. Barry?

In the six months we have been in the program, I have not found evidence of physical or mental abuse beyond that which is absolutely necessary to control an out-of-control youngster. Any restraining is done as gently as is possible with a violent kid, and only done when it will prevent harm to him or to others in the group. How would Mr. Barry handle such a situation? I find it unconscionable that Rhode Island officials would stop paying for children to be treated there because of this. Have the alternatives that they have chosen proven successful? I seriously doubt it.

There are many rules in the STRAIGHT program. You can either accept them and stay, or reject them and leave. No one is twisting your arm either way. The program has been in existence since 1976, and is one of the most highly acclaimed programs in the country. The present and former presidents of the United States and their wives have praised the program. If Peggy Donovan thinks that I and other parents in the program are "crazy and sick people," I consider that a compliment, as we are in excellent company. If having the courage to seek help for our children and ourselves in one of the most intense and successful programs in the country is "sick and crazy," then I humbly accept the charge]

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