

Couple, program honored as Daily Points of Light

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A St. Petersburg couple whose son waged war with drug addiction now volunteers more than 18 hours a week working with teen-age drug and alcohol abusers and their parents.

Through the Pinellas County School District's Volunteer Program, more than 17,000 parents, retirees, corporate employees and others do the same in public schools.

Both Susan and Terry Brimmer and the school district's volunteer program have been honored by President Bush as Daily Points of Light for their community service.

The Points of Light program recognizes individuals, families, businesses and organizations that are making a difference in their communities by helping others.

The Brimmers became involved with Straight Inc. four years ago when their son, [REDACTED], enrolled in the program in hopes of conquering alcohol and drug addiction.

Straight, which was founded in St. Petersburg 13 years ago, is a controversial drug-treatment program for teenagers that has won rave reviews and harsh criticism for its techniques.

During [REDACTED] 14-month treatment, the couple allowed 76 other youths participating in the program to stay in their home for varied lengths of time, Susan Brimmer said. One of the boys who lived with them is now considered part of the family, she said.

"We feel we owe them such a tremendous debt of gratitude because they saved our boys' lives," Brimmer said Wednesday. "I doubt they would be alive today if it were not for the Straight program.

"It also gives us extreme satisfaction to help other families with the same problem."

Although [REDACTED] has since graduated from the program, the Brimmers continue to work with other parents whose children are recovering from drug and alcohol addiction.

The St. Petersburg couple was recognized as the 656th Daily Point of Light on New Year's Day.

On Tuesday, the school district's Volunteer Program was honored as the nation's 668th Daily Point of Light for culling more than 17,000 regular school volunteers countywide.

Last year, the program contributed more than 865,000 volunteer hours to public schools in Pinellas, nearly one-third of which was spent tutoring students one-on-one.

Youth motivators and corporate mentors are matched with students who need extra attention, academic help and role models.

A 1989 survey of 200 middle and high school students matched with tutors, mentors or youth motivators showed that 89 percent of the students improved at least one letter grade over the previous year, according to school officials.

Seventy-five percent attended class more regularly, they said, and 92 percent exhibited greater self confidence based on interviews with teachers and guidance counselors.

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Page: 1

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