

Nancy Reagan Moved By Tales Of Drug Abuse

BY RANDY McNUTT
Enquirer Reporter

MOUNT REPOSE—Nancy Reagan watched Monday night as a 42-year-old father wept and recounted his son's abuse of alcohol. "I wanted to hurt . . . hurt my own son," to end the problem tearing apart his family, the man said.

She listened as the son told of his battle against drugs and his feeling that he just couldn't help himself.

The First Lady, on a two-day, four-city drug abuse prevention trip, was a guest at the regular Monday meeting of Straight, Inc., a non-profit drug rehabilitation center for young people near Milford in Clermont County.

In Lansing, Mich., earlier in the day, Mrs. Reagan was greeted by picketing Mondale-Ferraro supporters on her first stop of the trip.

Despite the campaign season, the First Lady said in an interview that she was making the trip because "I really want to keep the drug thing going." The trip is being paid for by the Reagan-Bush re-election committee.

SHE ARRIVED at Lunken Airport shortly before 4 p.m. Monday from Lansing and was whisked away in an eight-car motorcade to Cincinnati's Westin Hotel, where she freshened up before heading out to Clermont County for the evening session.

She was greeted by children singing songs of victory over drugs and stayed more than three hours at the center.

There she heard the father, who identified himself as Ron, say he watched his family slowly tear itself apart as his son's drug problem grew worse. The father told some 600 parents and children



NANCY REAGAN
... near tears at meeting

On The Inside

- First Lady hears tales of abuse, Page B-1.
- A look at Straight Inc., Page B-1.

that his son would often come home drunk and unruly.

"It hurt me so much to see him this way, I wanted to hurt him. I beat on him, but it didn't have any effect he was so drunk. I just wanted to hurt him more," he wept. "We had all basically given up."

The 17-year-old son, it was ar-

(See REAGAN,
back page, this section)

Reagan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A-1

rested for possessing drugs and eventually ended up at Straight.

The youth, Rob, told the crowd, "I've learned to be honest, to trust people, to love them."

HE ATTRIBUTED some of his problems to his desperate fight for attention. He said many nights he would cry out, "Why are you doing this to yourself?" But he could not help himself, he said.

The night was an emotional one. Young men cried as they told of despair. Their parents cried as they told of nights of fighting and worrying over their drunk and drugged children.

► Mrs. Reagan, whose eyes filled

with tears, said, "As one parent to another, I know there's no hurt a parent can be given that can equal that that your child can give you."

"It's a special hurt. We feel so helpless. Many times, I know you feel you have done something wrong. But I'm proud of you because you have supported your children and given them the love they need. They showed that need tonight."

Mrs. Reagan was presented with a small bronze figure of a child reaching out. It was carved by the parent of a Straight client.

THE FIRST LADY commended the young people for trying to help themselves. "We need you," she said. "You'll be taking over this world. We need you to be strong and quick. I want you to know that I'm proud of you for having

the courage to face up to your problems."

Mrs. Reagan first became acquainted with Straight in February, 1982, when she visited the group's St. Petersburg, Fla., center.

After spending the night in Cincinnati, Mrs. Reagan was scheduled to leave this morning for Indianapolis to continue the tour.

The Maest Repose center has 160 young people in the program under the care of 12 peer counselors, all program graduates, and an executive staff of four.

Straight officials say that 60% of those who enter the treatment, complete the program, and that 70% remain drug free for at least a year.

"Many of these kids did not develop coping mechanisms—the manners in which we handle our

frustrations—because they started on drugs as early as 11 years old," said Joan Humphrey of the Straight staff.

"MOST OF our kids are psychologically dependent on drugs, not addicted. Most are habitual users. They do drugs that are generally not physically addictive."

Throughout the meeting, the young people told of their battles with such drugs as marijuana, barbituates, LSD, cocaine, opium, alcohol and even horse tranquilizers.

Most of them said they abused their own bodies by burning themselves with cigarettes and cutting themselves with knives.

Additionally, most of them said they used drugs for six months before their parents found out. Most of the 160 young people also said

they used drugs at school, destroyed property, shoplifted and verbally abused their parents.

During the children's troubles, their parents said they lived in a nightmare. "I felt this sense of repulsion. I felt inadequate, totally worthless," a woman said. "I just want to get away from the pain. We fought over everything, from what time to get up to what time to eat."

BUT ALL seemed to be in harmony between parents and children during the meeting. The children clapped and sang, "I am strong, I am invincible, I am straight."

The First Lady was ushered in quietly before the parents were allowed in the building. She remained for the whole meeting, which lasted nearly three hours.



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(See REAGAN,
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE A-1

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