

Teenager Makes Important Decision;

Now He's *Straight* And On His Way

By CAROL REAM
Staff Writer

When [REDACTED] Kosti was 13, he was lying in a Michigan hospital, his stomach pumped, his body undergoing a blood transfusion, and his mind unsure whether he'd ever see 14. He survived, but only to repeat the excessive drinking that drove the alcohol level in his blood to 3.2 percent — the strength of some beers.

And Kosti was headed for worse. By the time he was 16, he was using 17 types of drugs, peddling acid, expelled from private and public schools, punching holes in walls with his fists and in trouble with the law.

Like thousands of other teenagers in America, Kosti was led by alcohol and drug troubles to a family-oriented treatment center called Straight.

About seven West Chester teenagers are now active in the program held in the Mt. Repose facility near Milford, one of only four in this nation. Because of Straight policies for those in early phases of the program, most of the Greenbelt participants were not permitted to give interviews for this story.

Kosti, however, is in the last of five phases.

In Michigan, psychiatrists and psychologists had told his parents he was going through "normal rebellion," and that they should loosen up. It was the teenagers and professionals at Straight that caught him in his con games.

"I used to have long hair, wear lots of neckties and always have a cigarette in my mouth," he said. "I think any kid who takes drugs is just a basic con."

After joining Straight he came to the conclusion, "I have to start growing up."

A West Chester woman has a similar story. Numerous problems she wasn't sure were drug related erupted with one of her teenage sons. She took him to see clergymen, counselors and physicians, but nothing worked.

Until that son and his younger brother enrolled in Straight.

"I would have mortgaged my home to get them there," she says now.

Today the woman warns troubled parents not to treat the thought that a drug problem might exist in the family "like leprosy."

"Don't believe that these things just don't happen to nice people," she said. "I've found out that they can happen to any family."

Kosti moved to West Chester with his mother and brother to be closer to the Mt. Repose facility.

'I think any kid who takes drugs is just a basic con. . .'

Kosti

The programs, which cost about \$3,000 for Cincinnati area youth and more for out-of-towners, are for drug users between the ages of 12-21.

Sixty percent of those who enroll are boys. The average age of enrollees is 17. The average age Straight teenagers were when they began using drugs was 12.

No doubt about it, Straight is an intensive program.

Teenagers who join are pulled from school to begin days of rap sessions at the Mt. Repose building with others who have taken an oath to become drug-free. Girls are separated from boys.

There are no locks on Straight's doors.



KOSTI

Although sometimes kids first taken there don't know where they are going, their being in the program requires their willingness.

The program is based on the theory that peer pressure is what turns teenagers onto drugs, and that peer pressure is the best tool for turning them onto drug-free, constructive lives. The Straight philosophy is that kids help kids best. At Straight, parents also help parents, and families help families.

Parental involvement is required with every Straight child, and sibling participation is strongly encouraged.

The program lasts 9-14 months, depending on individual progress, and includes weekly, large group sharing, with as many as 125 people in a meeting room, said Gerald Rushing, director of the Milford facility. The rest of the sessions are smaller.

"It's amazing," Rushing said. "Youngsters can stand up and share some pretty twisted parts of their lives and still be accepted. It's a healing process."

In the first phase, "clients," as Straight personnel call enrollees, are required to be at the facility 12 hours daily Monday-Saturday, and seven hours on Sunday.

Tight restrictions are set, dictating which people clients can see, what type of clothing clients can wear and what sort of music they can listen to. Rock music is barred from the program.

Emphasis is placed on a teenager's development of honesty about his or her life as a "druggie."

At night, a teenager in phase one lives with a host family which has a child in an advanced stage of the program.

In phase two, the youth returns to his or her own home to work on strengthening family relationships. The hours he or she is required to be at the facility are the same as in the first phase.

In phase three, the youth returns to school or work during the days, and reports to the facility in the evenings and on weekends.

Phase four lets the youth start to withdraw from active involvement in the program. Restrictions are still intact, but with written permission, the client is allowed to take recreational trips with family or friends in the program.

The final phase gives the enrollee more personal freedom, having by this time, reduced required trips to the facility to three days per week. Social responsibility, especially, is stressed during this period.

For more information on Straight, call 575-2673.