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Going straight, with help from some friends

staif writer

Nine kids sat in a circle on chairs, looking for all the world like a casting director's version of typical suburban teens — one with a Mohawk, one in harces, one chubby, one thin, one with dark good looks, one like a blond surfer, one brooding and introspective, one pixle hiding under a cute hat, one unched up on a chair and seeming eager to play the role of misfit.

Such articulateness a casting director could only dream about. They spoke in complete sontenecs, philosophizing about life and their part in it, about the iribulations of being a teenager, about fighting to feel not so welrd (the way everyone fights to feel not so welrd (the way everyone fights to feel not so welrd with high school and thinke that he or she may be the only one than the control of t

were an recovering cohol.

They gather for an hour every week with counselor Al Dicken at West Bloomfield High School to tell each other that what hey've done is right, that it's the rest of the kids on booze and pot and coke who are nessing up. And it's easier to keep believing it, to

And it's easier to keep belleving it, to fight the fight, to keep their peers from sucking them back into a world of hang-overs and had grades and cops and distrusting the series when they can keep getting together to reinforce each other.

**United they stand, divided they fall. And so they meet with Dicken once a week.

so they meet with Dicken once a week.

• Joe is 16. (All of the names here have been changed) He started doing pot and mescaline when he was 11. He quit when he was 15, has been through treatment programs in Ohlo and Minnesota and has been straight for seven months.

• "Trm Fred. I started using when I was 13. I've been straight three months. I went through treatment at Maplegrove and my drug of choice is pote, and I started using when I was 13. I've been straight for two years.

• Many started using alcohol and mescaline when she was 114s. She went to Straight Inc. in Plymouth and has been straight for rive months.

• Beth started doing LSD when she was 10, is 17 now and has been straight for rive months.

months.

** • "I'm Traci. My drugs of choice were alcohol and pot and I've been straight for six months, 2½ weeks."

** "Her drug of choice is sugar," hollered.

Teacher reaches out:

Dichen knows when to step in, to sak a. The rap sessions at West Hopmiled bequite section that can rechannel their energy an more than three years ago with one proper and their energy and their have grown accustomed to, front them have grown accustomed to, front friends, neighbors and relatives who may be wondering when they are going to scrow in the program "said Dicken. "Alcohol has always program." said Dicken. "Alcohol has always to the program "said Dicken."

out Terry and they all laughed. They finish each other's sentences, punch each other in the arm good-naturedly, laugh loudly and contaglously, litting together like fingers locked in prayer.

WHAT IS THE toughest thing they deal

"Avoiding using friends and dealing with the beredom," said Mary. "Saying no and people saying you're brainwashed." "Handling the same pressures that made you want to deak."

you want to drink."
"Finding new friends."
They holler out answers so quickly you can't put the names with the voices.

staff writer—

The Dickern is a list with an athletic build in the property of the same grid in choose of the property of the same grid in choose of the property of the same grid in choose of the property of the same grid in choose of the property of the group of the group of the grid in the property of the group of the group of the grid in the property of the group of the group of the grid in the group of the gr

win the kids.

BUT THE HOUNLONG sessions—they vary in time from week to week so that the kids worth where to miss for much of say given class — aren't all free form.

Dicken knows when to step in the say of th

and ways.
"Everything is harder, at least for me.
Before, if I did anything, it didn't take any
work because I was too drunk to know. It
was easier when I was ---ed up. Does that

the his my drug; Some are limited, in their above, some are intense. The problem is (that kits are starting systems and younger. —And the amazing thing is that with a low of them, their parents are starting them of. They say, There, have a drink, We I silter have you on alrohol than drug. It's unbe-lievable.

AND WHAT'S the best thing about their new-found sobriety?
"Not being tired all the time."
"Being able to tell my parents where I'm "Being and to team,"
going."
"Not having to put eyedrops in my eyes
and not being paranold," said Mary.
Fred can't think of anything to likes
about being sober. He is the newest member of the group and misses his old friends
and ways.

Terry. "When I used to get a C, my parents were real happy. Now I get a C and they're upset. If my parents get one call a week from school about me, that was great. Now, it's terrible."

"DON'T YOU feel like we're the lucky ones, now, though?" someone threw out for debate.

"I do," said Ben, tacitum up till now. "I don't have to live in fear anymore. If I'm going to have an accident. How I'm going to get home. Are my parents going to find out I'm drunk? I'm almost positive I'd be dead y now if I had been doing those things these five months."
"I'm lucky," said the student with braces.
"I learned a lot of things, and not just about

my addiction, but how to deal with life."
Later she admits she sold herself for drugs and boore. Now, she 'agetting A's and B's and proud of it. She laughs and giggles like a 16-year-old does and prostitution seems like a word she'd have to look up in

seems like a word she'd have to look up in the dictionary. Fred still lish't sure. "I see it both ways. But in my insides, I feel unlucky. These are the only years I can be irresponsible... I wished I could have screwed up for two more years and then got straight." So why did he go straight? "The court would have ordered treatment if I didn't do it voluntarily."

would nave order to eather in Audit to it voluntarily."

"I wish I wasn't addicted so I could go out and party and have a good time," said Ter-ry. "But I'm a lot more responsible person, My day trusts me with his house, now. And he doesn't have to worry about his liquor cabinet."

"MOST OF the time I'm happy," said Mary. "I have better friends, like Traci-over there. Now I have people to talk to when I have problems. But sometimes I'm mad I'm a druggle 'cause I want to go out and get high. Why do I have this damned

disease?"
Fred adds: "My old friends don't have time for me anymore because they're out getting drunk. I ency them. They're doing my drinking for me."
Some of them always hated school and still do. Some have found a thrill in good

Some of them always have shoot and still do. Some have found a thrill in good grades.

"I like seeing A's and B's on paper," sald Track. Chris had a .8 average on his last report card before therapy. That's a Dnimus. Now he's pulling down C's. Mary got live E's and a D last year. This year, sho's got a D, an E and the rest B's and C's. May grades have gone up big tume," said Terry. "Big dime."
"SCHOOL SUCKS," says Fred. "Before, when I was using, school was a place to get away from my parents and get high. Being drunk made things so much easter." I can't Imagine myself using." I can't insighe myself using." I won't use, said Mary. "I'd never be able to face anyone."
"DAY BY DAY, one day at a time, AA all

able to face anyone."

"DAY By DAY, one day at a time, AA all the way, hollered out Yrach, who said she had to fight be convince her parents she needed help to get off pot and booze. They thought it was just the usual teenage stiff.

A bell rings. A non-stop hour has gone by like a non-stop minute, and it is time for their next class. Laughing and giggling the way kids in high schools have always laughed and giggled at the bell announcing a five-minute break between classes, they gather up their books and rush out the door.

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Programs try to help

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- WOLIUNG RUNS programs for third, sixth, seventh and ninth graders, as well as a drinking-and-triving program for 10th graders. Right now, there are some junior high kids selling caffeline pilts as speed, it isn't speed, but the buyer doesn't know it, said Wollung.

- And there is the realization that drug use often grows out of bordom. To help give kids things to do, Rochester High has instituted Gymand Swim on Saurday nights, which draws about 200 kids a week.

Not all schools have pools. Not all systems can afford the luxury of inschool programs and counselors who spend most of their time fighling substance abuse. No matter what the school, no matter what the school, no matter what the school, no matter what the community, though, there are programs available to help students who are being sucked into the quicksand of booze and drugs.

Maplegrove in West Bloomfield, run by Henry Ford Hospital, has programs for kids from kindergarten ge through high school. Its five-part series, "Are You Concerned?," has been at schools in Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Livonia, Wayne-West land, Clarenceville and Redford in school programs, Maplegrove in a 42-day residency program.

STRAIGHT INC., which has operated in Plymouth for nearly one year, runs an intense program where kids live at home but are in treat-

ment from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. six days a week. It is available to kids from throughout the area. Growth Works in Plymouth has fought teen drug abuse since 1975 and does in-patient treatment for about 100 kids a year. The courts, too, have begun to become part of the solution. Al Kaczkowski is a case worker with Rochester Area Youth Guidance, which is sponsored by the probate court, the cities of Rochester and Rochester Hills, Oakland Township and Rochester Community Schools. It is his job to help problem children before they become immersed in the court system, largely through referrals. He handled 75 cases last year and fully 92 percent of them, 68 kids, were involved with alcohol and other drugs.

DESPITE THE increased awareness by the courts, the creation of inschool substance-abuse programs, community groups such as Troy Youth Assistance and Straight Inc., many experts feel the problem of substance abuse won't be corrected by counseling or after-the-fact help. It must be solved through a societal shift away from the use of already and drugs, and it must be solved by stronger families and support at home.

"Counseling is a start, but, Karzkowski sald, "the final solution in the comment of the spent in informing the community of the things going on." My whole feeling is it? the break-down in the family system," said corry Kwas, a supervisor with the Livonia Counseling Center. "Kids are more lonely, more unsupervised. They have a feeling and no place to cal with that feeling, no one to talk to. Kids want to belong."

to. Kids want to belong."
"Education is the key," said Carl
Berry, police chief of Plymouth
Township, "People have to understand what choice grassross level.
Educate bactones grassross level.
Educate parents, educate educators,
colucate kids. I believe one people
understand what substances will do,
they'll make the right choice.
"After that, go to serious enforcement: ... The police department
isn't the answer. It's parental involvement as well as heavy, heavy
educational involvement."

This story was researched by editors and reporters from all 12 of the Observer and Eccentric newspapers and was written by staff writer Tom Henderson.

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Drug war costly

Prevention programs studied

OF THE 18 that measured changes in attitudes toward drug and alcohol abuse, 15 showed a positive effect. Four alcohol abuse programs for college students that theorporated peer counseling were unasually helpful in changing attitudes. Two programs that relied exclusively on lectures by professionals had the least

Bangert-Drowns found one more encouraging fact— some of the alcohol and drug education programs have a delayed impact. Reduced drug use showed up as much as a year later in five of the programs. Apparently, Bangert-Drowns concludes, drug abuse projects are most effective in increasing students' knowledge, less successful in changing their attitudes

"ALTHOUGH the accumulated evidence suggested that substance abuse education has not been effectively used or evaluated in the schools," Bangert-Drowns said, "there are positive indications that they can work.

"Since that is the case, experts in the field had better start asking hard questions, doing thorough evaluations, and setting up programs they know will actually change behavior."

Despite the lack of hard data, substance abuse programs may serve other functions, Bangert-Drowns suggests. "A significant service of the programs is to reassure parents that the schools are at least trying to control the problem."