



Going straight

Drug rehabilitation is a family affair

By IRENE HEATH

Journal staff writer

"I'm on the top of the wor-ruld / looking down on creation / and the only explanation I can find / is the love that I found / ever since you've been around..."

It was a zesty performance, if not musically perfect. The chorus was made up completely of self-confessed "druggies" — average age, 17.

Richard and Rose Lynn Schwartz didn't know for sure when they walked up to the front row of the large hall in Springfield, Va., but as it turned out, it was the night of their son's graduation from Straight, Inc.

The Schwartzes are your typical nice, middle-class suburban couple — Richard, 46, is a pediatrician; Rose Lynn, 44, teaches at an elementary school and does volunteer work at a hospital.

They're coping with a typical, middle-class, suburban problem. (According to a 1983 study by National Institute on Drug Abuse, 6 percent of all teenagers drink daily; one out of 18 high school seniors smokes pot daily.) Their tall, wholesome-looking, 16-year-old son Keith is, in his own words, "chemically dependent." Before he entered the Straight program he was heavily into marijuana.

Keith's rehabilitation became a family affair when he was enrolled in Straight. It has meant a strong commitment for everyone in the Fairfax household, including Keith's two sisters — Lisa, 18, and Keira, 15 — who for the past 17 months have periodically been attending sibling counseling

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Richard Schwartz

sessions at Straight.

The idea of families having a strong hand in drug rehabilitation isn't new, but the practice of counseling the entire family has intensified in recent years. "It's most helpful to include family members," says Deany Laliotis of the Prince George's County Health Department. "You can do a lot of work with this young person and then have it undone."

In the case of the Schwartzes, they selected a program that demanded much more of parents than counseling sessions. It has meant being part of an extended family. When Keith was in the first phase of the program, he was monitored 24

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Families p

FAMILY from B1

hours a day — he spent days filled with rap sessions at the Straight facility (a former sports supply warehouse) and evenings with the family of a young man who had progressed to a more advanced phase. Later, the Schwartzes returned the favor by opening their home to "newcomers," with Keith serving as a role model.

Keith speaks with enthusiasm about the host family who "helped me get my life together" during the first difficult weeks. "I got a lot of help at that house," he says, sitting on a couch in a large, sunny recreation room filled with with robust plants. "I confided more in them than I did in my parents," he says.

And of course his Straight housemate understood him. "You can't con a con," Keith says with a knowing smile, only too aware of the devious, manipulative tactics a druggie uses on his loved ones. "We've seen and heard it all."

Straight: Rocky start

Straight isn't for everyone. The program got off to a rocky start not too long after the local program opened in October 1982. A former client who was in the program both in St. Petersburg, Fla. and in Springfield, Va., says he was held against his will for five months. In May 1983 he won a \$220,000 lawsuit. Charges that he was physically and emotionally abused were dismissed in court. Straight has filed an appeal to the lawsuit, which is still pending.

Straight is still considered by some to be too strict, especially *with newcomers (no TV, no radio; no mail or phone calls without permission)*. Two months ago, however, Straight got a positive recommendation for a special use zoning permit from the Fairfax County Health Care Advisory Board. Straight spokeswoman Suzanne Byrd says clients are now kept more closely informed of their legal rights.

Participating in the Straight program means bearing your soul be-

fore an audience at open meetings. It's apparent that talking about his painful past has become old hat to Keith. With a clear, intelligent, direct gaze, he tells his story with ease.

It's a story told over and over across the nation. At the age of 15 he was smoking pot "two or three times a day," he says. To support his habit, he stole from his family — money, a Hanukkah gift, a movie camera, liquor. His grades plummeted. Now and then there was alcohol or hash, but pot was the big thing.

Personality change

As is typical of drug users, Keith was unaware that his personality had changed, but on occasion he did recognize that his behavior was irrational. Once he held a knife at his sister Keira's throat. "I was just fooling around," he says but I knew it wasn't right; I was ashamed of myself. I didn't want to act like that, but I wanted to do drugs more."

Before the family realized that Keith was on drugs, his puzzling behavior caused untold heartache and distress. Keira's love for her brother

was fast disappearing. "I just started avoiding him," she says.

"Keith never appeared intoxicated," says Richard, who describes his son as having always been "difficult." Then one morning before school, Lisa spotted her younger brother smoking marijuana in his bedroom. She got on a phone and called her father at his office.

"It saved his life," says Richard. "We were seeing before our eyes a deteriorating human being. It was causing great turmoil and tension. The family was helpless. Within two weeks he was enrolled in the program."

Richard went a step beyond the average parent in trying to understand the effects of marijuana. He studied every piece of written material he could find on the subject and later wrote a special article on the subject for a trade publication, Pediatrics.

He writes: "The THC content of Californian marijuana currently averages more than 5 percent. The 'high' obtained from quality marijuana is considered by high school seniors who use drugs to be equal to the 'high' obtained from snorting



Journal photo by Jim Tingstrum

Keith Schwartz

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cocaine." (Source, "Student Drug Abuse, Attitudes and Beliefs," National Institute on Drug Abuse).

During his research he uncovered a large amount of testimony supporting theories on the danger of driving under the influence of pot.

"A lot of these kids are driving," says Richard.

Now, when Keith tells horror tales about the old days when a druggie friend would black out behind a wheel, Rose Lynn still shudders. "You turn white thinking about it," she says.

'Glad to pay back'

As for becoming a house parent to other parents' children, Rose Lynn doesn't look at the service as a sacrifice. "There have been adjustments," she says. "But I didn't give anything up. I kept my job and I still have time to do my volunteer work. We were glad to pay back for all the help Keith got."

Another change: The family no longer keeps liquor in the house for guests. Rose Lynn doesn't think of that as a sacrifice, either. Since they never drank more than a glass of wine on rare occasions, the Schwartzes hadn't noticed the supply of liquor dwindling. "It's no big deal not having it in the house," says Rose Lynn. "It means nothing to us."

It was a deeply moving experience for the Schwartzes when it was announced at a recent open meeting (for parents, clients and interested members of the public) that Keith was to be among the graduates that evening.

True to custom, family members took turns opening up their feelings before a microphone. Richard said he's been addicted to a "drug," too — work — though he doesn't see his

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time away from his family as a cause of Keith's problems.

Rose Lynne explained that Keith's difficulties went back to infancy when he was colicky and subject to ear infections. He was "squeezed in" between two well-behaved daughters. "We got calls from school; he wasn't bad, only mischievous," she said. But later the stealing began.

Lisa told Keith he can always call on her when he needs help. Keira talked about the hostile feelings she had toward Keith when his behavior was erratic. She also told him how proud she is of him and how much she loves him. Ditto for the rest of the family. Keith thanked all of them for their love and help. Their testimony was sealed with hugs and kisses all around. (Similar scenes were repeated among other families.)

The Schwartz family's involvement with Straight isn't over. In April, Richard signed up as medical director. Keith will continue with the program on an outpatient basis for a six-month aftercare program. During that period he will continue

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with counseling and refrain from dating. His companions will be most likely be limited to other Straight graduates, who get together for ski trips and other wholesome activities. ("It gives them a chance to develop healthy friendships that are not on a one-to-one basis," says Byrd.)

Keith says he knows he is facing a life-long struggle. He is convinced he should never take one sip of alcohol or any other drug that can trigger a renewed craving.

There's a touch of sadness in his eyes when he talks about his old "druggie friends." He says he knows he should steer clear of them. "Not unless they go straight," he says. "I care about them and I don't want to hurt them but I know they can harm me."

Being a role model for other people in later phases of the program has given Keith a chance to see drugs in a brand new perspective. "I know how much staying off has helped me," he says. "I really like being straight. I sit down and talk to them; I'd do anything to keep them off."

Help for drug users is nearby

HELP from B1

PANDAA (Parents Association to Neutralize Drug and Alcohol Abuse) sponsors a hotline staffed by parents who have lived through abuse problems, a newsletter and a court watch committee. PANDA also works with schools to promote stronger anti-drug regulations. Call 237-8121.

Second Genesis has residential facilities in Alexandria, Montgomery County, Prince George's County and Washington. The program, for ages 14 to 45, is highly structured with group, individual and family therapy, vocational training, career planning. Average stay is eight months for teens, 12 months for adults. There's also a Friends of Genesis support group.

Staff includes psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, mental health and education specialists, addiction specialists, family therapists. Seventy percent of the 280 residents (total for all four facilities) are referred by the courts and 30 percent are self-referrals. Fee is \$25.50 a day; provi-

sions are made for those who can't pay (funded by state and local jurisdictions). Call 855-1545 or write to Second Genesis, 4720 Montgomery Lane, Suite 502, Bethesda, Md. 20814.

Straight, Inc. Springfield. Some 210 clients from Virginia, Maryland and other parts of the country are participating in Straight. When they enter the first phase of the program, they stay with families of other Straight clients and can only communicate with their own families over a microphone during open meetings. Families (or substitutes) must act as host parents for other newcomers and attend sessions. As the participants progress they return to home and school, attending therapeutic sessions with gradually decreasing frequency. The average treatment period is 12 months.

The maximum fee is \$4,000 regardless of time required. Provisions can be made for those who lack funds. Call 642-1980.

"**Straight Talk**," a radio call-in talk show dealing with drug use,

airs 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday evenings on WGTS 91.9 FM. Show host is Silver Spring resident Bill Burns, father of two sons who have recovered from drug problems. Call 270-0101.

Toughlove. Support groups for parents having difficulty with their children meet weekly to discuss problems and solutions. Call 698-7546 (Virginia) or 301-490-0600 (Maryland).

Washington Area Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse provides information on programs in all parts of the Washington metropolitan area — from small groups to professional counseling. Call 783-1300.

Many of the above programs work closely with the self-help groups, **Alcoholics Anonymous** (842-1552) and **Narcotics Anonymous** (459-9355 or 338-7989).