



Photo by Kurt Herrmann

AT THE NARCO office in Lambertville are, from left, James Melton, Cindy Carlen, the Rev. David Errickson and Laura Crawley.

Center Fights Alcoholism, Drug Use

Staff Of Four In Lambertville Offer Countywide Assistance

By Pat Herrmann

What exactly do they do at the NARCO center in Lambertville?

The staff, headed by fulltime part-timer Rev. David Errickson, is putting together a pamphlet that explains the center's purpose and game plan.

But a local drinker in town has a different idea: he thinks Mr. Errickson stole his liquor bottle, and dropped by the center office recently to make the accusation. (It was untrue).

The pamphlet will point out what the four person office really does: it deals

county-wide with an education and self-help program of drug abuse treatment and prevention. And most persons who do drop in aren't looking for their bottle, but a way to break away from drugs or alcohol.

The center at the corner of Church and North Main streets is the first outreach center established as a "branch office" of the main Trenton office of NARCO (Narcotic Addicts Rehabilitation Center Organization, a seven-year-old, private, and non-profit organization funded by a variety of sources).

The center gets both "referrals," or persons remanded to the agency by pre-trial intervention or other law enforcement agencies. Sometimes a person having trouble with drugs or alcohol — or one who knows someone

Ms. Carlen works days at the center and studies criminal justice at night college classes. Melton, after working with Betty Anderson and the Hunterdon Council on Alcoholism for two and a half years, came to the center with experience on two counts: on the job expertise and personal recovery from addiction.

Melton says he finds that young people diagnosed as "alcoholic" often have a wide range of exposure to drug use of all kinds. "It's the same type of work," he says of dealing with both drug and alcohol abuse.

The counselor also works for the state Division of Motor Vehicles, screening persons convicted of drunken driving for placement in treatment or education courses that are required before their drivers' licenses are can be restored to them.

who is — drops by on his own, the staff says.

Cindy Carlen and James Melton are "outreach counselors," or paraprofessionals in the field of drug counseling. Someday soon, the center may hire a part-time psychologist, says Mr. Errickson.

Laura Crawley rounds out the staff by handling the secretarial position. But the staff you see at the center's corner office is backed up by many persons you don't see there.

There is a physician on call for emergency contact by the center; Phillips-Barber Health Center gives a room for this doctor's use when he is required to give physical examinations to some of the center's clients.

Many well-known names in the area are on the center's sponsors list.

Parents Asked help

Mr. Errickson, a lifetime Lambertville resident and pastor of the Wesleyan Church there, says the need for such a drug center came to light a year and a half ago when parents of a drug abuser asked for community help. From a nucleus of parents, the group grew to include local clergy, doctors and business leaders.

With a \$35,000 federal grant in hand, the center's sponsors went looking for staff and an office. Now they have both and are "getting moving," says Mr. Errickson.

Changes are still needed in the office. State regulations require that the second office be completely separated from the front room by a wall, to provide privacy for clients when they are receiving counseling. Of course, records are strictly private also.

"It's a self-help program" that NARCO is running, says the staff. People with drug abuse problems come in for all kinds of help: medical, employment, social, financial.

The center's workers hope to see the inside of every school in Hunterdon, when they are invited to make a presentation. At high schools, the focus will be on drug education and the why of involvement. In the lower grades, it will be on prevention, rather than treatment.

Stockton School had the NARCO staff last month; South Hunterdon earlier this month; the counselors will go to Delaware Valley Regional in December and January and Central next month.

Other schools, like Lambertville, have chosen to make the center a resource agency to which they can turn for programming on drugs as part of the health curriculum.

Teenagers say that peer experience with narcotics of some kind — be it drugs or alcohol — may reach 90 percent of all high schoolers in some schools, Mr. Errickson says.

Young people have told him, he says, that teenage involvement with drugs and alcohol is extremely high in the county's high schools.

Lewis Ware, who directs the Lambertville center from his Trenton office, says one of the worst problems NARCO faces is the fact that parents of teenage drug abusers just can't or won't face their responsibility because of embarrassment or a feeling that they will be considered inadequate parents.