

Lambertville Drug Awareness Program

By Terry Wright

Helping both drug abusers and their families is the approach used by the Hunterdon Drug Awareness Program, a Lambertville-based group formerly known as NARCO (Narcotic Addicts Rehabilitation Center Organization).

It is a private, non-profit organization still affiliated with the state NARCO.

Adrienne A. Peck of Raritan Township is director of the program.

She once worked for the narcotic commission in New York City, as a rehabilitation counselor for heroin addicts. She finds the drug problem in Hunterdon is quite different.

"Here, people are more likely to do one or more drugs, like alcohol or marijuana, plus something else. That could be anything — amphetamines, barbiturates, hashish, inhalants."

The center office at 45 Church Street is a "drug-free outpatient treatment center," which Ms. Peck explains means it is not designed for persons using a drug substitute such as meth done. It is for persons trying to avoid all drugs.

"We get court referrals, recommendations from schools, persons sent by the probation department, by their parents or some who come in on their own," she said.

The center offers individual, group and family counselling by appointment. Primary counsellor is Jean Allegretti, who works with clients all over the county. She works out of Hunterdon Central High School every Wednesday afternoon and evening.

Prevention Work

Pat Miller is the group's outreach counsellor. Much of her time is in prevention work, speaking to students and other groups.

Judy Anne Dowdy, a work-study student from South Hunterdon Regional High School, is secretary.

Dr. Harold Stecker, a psychologist, serves as part-time consultant for family counselling sessions.



Staff photo by Terry Wright

DRUG ABUSE program director Adrienne A. Peck admits there are no easy answers to the problem.

According to Ms. Peck, the average client comes in for about seven months, at least twice a month for individual counselling and twice a month with members of his family.

She said the program is different from other drug counselling programs in that it involves the family, and this results in it being highly successful. The national statistics say 25 percent of clients remains in a drug program for six months, but at

Lambertville, the ratio is around 80 percent.

"We have so very few drop out. Apparently they feel it is very meaningful and helpful in dealing with stressful family situations."

Ms. Peck was quick to point out that drug abuse "is just indicative of an underlying problem. There is no single cause. We try to individualize the treatment."

The unit deals with schools from all over

Offers Counseling, Outpatient Treatment

Hunterdon, plus the Hopewell Valley Regional High School district.

It is led by an advisory board of 25 persons, including a freeholder, police officials, educators and others.

The Lambertville facility had its beginning four years ago when Police Chief Frank Masterson, now retired, Rev. David Errickson, pastor of the Wesleyan Church, and several other community leaders decided something had to be done to counter drug abuse in the south county. Errickson was guiding force of the original NARCO program but has now resumed full-time duties with his church.

Half Are Young

Ms. Peck said the ratio between young persons (ages 15-25) and older ones is about 50-50. The center is treating 20 clients this month and in the past two-and-a-half years has treated about 80.

Ms. Peck, who is a native of Flemington and has a college degree in sociology and a master's in criminology, has participated in numerous training programs for counselling. She noted that drug abusers are generally unnoticed until a crisis occasion. Then they seek treatment."

program has speakers like Ms. Miller who will talk to community groups. Ms. Peck said the Lambertville office has copies of an excellent booklet on youth drug use, "Parents, Peers and Pot," available to anybody who stops by. It is open weekdays 9-5, and Monday and Tuesday until 8 p.m.

The program is financed with federal and state grants, but she said more money is

always needed to expand operations. Ms. Peck said the county freeholders provide some money. She is currently trying to line up contributions from groups like service clubs.

"We do have limited funds. With more organization support, we would be able to do more drug prevention work and family therapy. The more funds, the more we can do."

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