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An Examination of  
STRAIGHT INCORPORATED

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There were several reasons why Straight, Inc. asked us to go to St. Petersburg to examine their programme and to prepare a critical report: we have been students of the use and abuse of drugs for over twenty years; we have a particular interest in the nature of religious and political cultism; and we have studied the techniques of persuasion in some detail. We have collaborated on the writing of numerous papers and four books on these diverse subjects. And, finally, we have no connection whatsoever with Straight or any of its people. It was likely, then, that we would submit an objective and unbiased report and that Straight, as a result, might benefit from our observations.

Before we went to St. Petersburg we spoke to Robert L. DuPont, M.D., who had himself seen the programme in action and who had expressed much interest in it. Dr. DuPont pointed out, however, that there were certain aspects of the programme that had been criticized in the past, and he felt that an appraisal of these elements was especially needed. We prepared, accordingly, a series of questions that included those of Dr. DuPont but which, in the end, comprised a far larger list. We then set out to answer these questions as fully as we could in the course of a six day intensive exposure to every aspect of the Straight programme.

We would like to say, at the outset, that everyone at Straight - the Board members, the executive staff, the senior and junior staffs, the

trainees and the members of the Straight community - were extraordinarily helpful to us. They were, all of them, open and forthcoming; and in spite of the nature of our consultation we did not detect any hostile or defensive attitudes or any attempt at deception. We saw the process of Straight, just as it was, between August 20 and August 25, 1981. We did not participate: we observed; and we talked to many people and groups of people when they were not actually involved in the operation of the programme. In addition to this we were given a complete collection of the written materials used at Straight.

We will consider each of the questions on our list. These questions are not of equal importance nor is the order of their inclusion here of any significance. We assume that the reader of this report has some comprehension of what Straight is all about. That is to say the reader knows that Straight is designed to bring about a reversal of the system of values and behaviours that characterize the drug using teenage subculture by bringing to bear on the participants massive peer pressure to eschew the use of drugs and subscribe, once again, to the values that have characterized the mainstream of American culture for some time.

#### What facilities does Straight have to offer?

The most striking initial observation is that there is a complete absence of any of the diverting things to do that characterize most other drug treatment centres. Thus there is no swimming pool, no gymnasium and no outdoor sports space. There are no movies, hikes, ball games or dances. There are short periods of simple stretching exercises but there is no physiotherapy and no occupational therapy. This is very noticeable but it is not dismaying. The purpose of Straight is to offer a drug free

environment in which the concentrated focus will be on the goal of re-acculturation. No ancillary diversions, however therapeutic they are held to be in other centres, are used here.

Straight offers sustenance, and this is quite adequately supplied, and a roof over everyone's head; but there are no entertainments and nothing to facilitate the improvement of skills other than interpersonal ones. There is no woodworking shop, no pool table and no library. It is true that all such activities are elements of the inclusive culture but it is assumed that the crucial learning that must be done by the participants for the relatively short period of time that they are at Straight has to do with coming to understand how they might function in society without using drugs of any kind. It may be that this is one of the reasons why Straight can offer help to so many people at so low a cost; but it was clear to us that it was not economy that engendered the elimination of every activity from didactic lectures to assistance in the creative use of leisure time. These things were left out because they were considered to be inessential to the main purpose. We could not fault Straight on this point.

Indeed we did, at least for a while, seriously question the failure to give information about the effects of drug use. We did not think, for long, that there would be any advantage in having experts deliver lectures because we realized that this particular population had been exposed to such influences for some time without for a moment being guided by it. There is a place for drug education but there is no doubt that its greatest impact is on those adolescents who have not already determined upon a course of drug habituation. The population at Straight was made up of people who had become thoroughly involved in the drug using culture and they were refractory to the didactic approach. We

thought, after that, that there might be some advantage in having individual participants prepare statements themselves that they might, in due course, give to the general group. We found, however, that the undeniable effects of drug use were far more graphically given in a most unorganized way in the course of the group meetings. The dramatic effect of a serious testimonial touching on the experience of a former user of marijuana, cocaine, methaqualone and alcohol was far more affecting and memorable than would be any learned dissertation on the same subject. We gave up on that criticism.

### Does Straight engage in brainwashing?

We had the distinct impression that it was because of criticism from various quarters asserting that the Straight programme brainwashed the participants that we were consulted in the first place.

Now the term brainwashing carries a heavy emotional freight. It implies that through the use of various techniques of persuasion a person's sentiments, values and attitudes are wiped out and replaced by a system of thought and feeling that is utterly novel and alien to the pre-existing personality. Of course all psychotherapeutic interventions attempt to change various aspects of the subject's ways of living in the world. It is assumed that his maladjustment, and his psychic distress, is referable to his faulty thinking, feeling and acting and that these must be corrected if he is to become a comfortable, productive and socially responsible person. It would be absurd for us to derogate all such efforts on the part of helping people by using the word brainwashing to describe their work. We should, rather, reserve this word for programmes that are not only drastic but that also apply all of the following essential

techniques.

1. The subject must be isolated from his accustomed environment, and constant surveillance must be maintained over him. He must be made completely dependent on the resocializing institution for the satisfaction of all his needs.

Now in the case of Straight this first requirement is satisfied but this is so for as brief a time as possible. The adolescent is taken out of his home and school and he spends twelve of his hours at Straight and the other twelve in a foster home. He is never alone. We may deplore this practice but if we are to be entirely practical we must recognize that this is the only way to establish a drug free environment, and such an environment is a sine qua non for recovery from drug dependence in virtually every case. Hospitals and jails remove people from their usual places for various reasons but, unfortunately, they do not very often maintain not only drug free environments but also an attitude, on the part of the patients or inmates, that such a condition is desirable. Straight meets this problem head on and satisfies, accordingly, the first requirement.

2. The second condition is that all past statuses must be given up. Straight does this insofar as it accords no value whatsoever to the drugged state or to the values of the drug culture. The subject declares that he is "a druggie" and that as such he was out of control and injurious to himself and others. At Straight it is strictly the culture and status of the druggie that is abhorred. The years leading up to the use of drugs and the goals that were never entirely extirpated by the drug user are honoured. If a person is accepted by the group because he comes to recognize that the intoxicated life is less than agreeable, then we would be perverse indeed if we held

that this was an exhibition of brainwashing.

It is quite true that the drugged mind is not accepted by Straight and that, on the contrary, the drug free mind is acclaimed; but such positions are maintained by the general society, and therefore we must see that the process encouraged by Straight is entirely normative.

It is normative unless we hold that the persistently drugged state is the ideal condition to which our society must aspire. Straight, clearly, does not satisfy the second requirement.

3. The third requirement is that there must be a complete denial of the worth of the old self. The brainwashers take a person who is acculturated to a given society and they render him entirely hostile to that condition. Straight does this too, but the immediately pre-existing patterns of thought were entirely malignant in relation to the values and behaviours of the inclusive society. An advanced cultural relativist might well hold that the drug culture is as beneficial to its members and as worthy of respect as is the inclusive society. Straight says quite simply that the culture of a group of drugged 16 year olds is not on a level with that of their drug free peers. We agree with this position and we would like to point out, moreover, that the cultural relativists have done an immense amount of injury to the adolescents of the United States over the last twenty years. They have disseminated confusion and anguish with their repeated assertions to the effect that if the country is to be truly free then no moral distinctions should be made between the choice of continuous intoxication and the drug free state. Many learned scholars have insisted that the truly civilized society would encourage the making of the wise personal choice with regard to drug use and that, furthermore, the choice made by the adolescent seekers

after the enlightenment of oblivion must be fully honoured. The drug culture, for them, is just another interesting and legitimate facet of our complex society.

Straight does not support this position, but it is only the moral worth of the drugged lifestyle that is rejected. To attempt to assist a drug afflicted adolescent to learn, all over again, the values of the society to which he subscribed before he started using drugs is not to satisfy the third requirement of brainwashing. It is not a radically new system that is presented to the subject; it is, rather, the system that he has been familiar with all his life and which he rejected after he became dependent on the mind altering chemical.

4. The fourth requirement is that the subject must be an active participant in his own resocialization. Yes, Straight does this. Self analysis and self criticism, both privately (through the constant preparation of a moral inventory) and publicly (through the forthright series of revelations to the group), are essential to this programme. And this could be dangerous, as it has been in many organizations that use this device. This is the central technique of the group encounter and of many religious and political revivalist movements. History abounds with fearful examples.

We knew that this technique would be a vital element of the Straight programme and we were especially careful to be observant regarding its use and possible misuse. The group encounter, when it is not controlled, can be a dangerous instrument; and many studies have attested to the psychological and even physical injuries that have been attributed to its use.

Yet there are some applications of this method that are not only benign



but also helpful. Alcoholics Anonymous uses a variant of the group encounter with much benignity and value. Group psychotherapy led by responsible mental health workers can be similarly effective and benevolent.

The variation used at Straight is intriguing because it would seem to be both novel and non-injurious. A large group of 100 or more people are faced by two staff members, and a topic will be suggested. The people wave their hands, indicating their desire to speak, and one of the staff members issues the first name of one of them. This person then stands up and comments, usually for only a few minutes, on some aspect of his own life that throws light on the topic at hand. If it is sensed by some others that the speaker is not being quite honest, their waving hands may be recognized and a second speaker may address himself directly to the person already standing. His comment is brief and the first speaker then continues to the end of his statement. The staff member may also interject a question but it was clear to us that the role of the staffer was to be the undoubted authority in the room. This was not a leaderless, gut level encounter in which any member of the group may be centred out and relentlessly attacked from every quarter without the support of any one at all. At Straight the encounter was very carefully controlled. It was parliamentary in that the staff member representing the chair would recognize a single member and no interruption would be permitted without the permission of the chair. Indeed Houses of Parliament are frequently in a condition of pandemonium and very little respect may be shown to the person who has the floor. At Straight such respect is the absolute rule. We observed some violations of this rule but the interesting thing about that was that the person who presumed to interrupt was accorded no

support by either the staff member or the group. In a high school classroom the interrupting person might well be regarded with some esteem; at Straight the interrupter is simply ignored. There is no reward for breaking the rules of order.

In short Straight did emphasize self criticism and some of the confessions that we heard were made with an immense amount of feeling; but we did not feel that the technique as it was applied at Straight was intrinsically injurious. It was checked by rules of conduct subscribed to by the entire group. It was restrained and at no time was it specifically designed to bring about irrationality. The brainwashers seek to reduce the critical capacity of their subjects' minds. At Straight the emphasis was on just the opposite: the participants should think and they should at no time set aside their natural ability to pursue a logical sequence of thought.

5. The fifth requirement is that the resocializers must present both negative and positive sanctions. That is to say the brainwasher will advise his subject that some dire punishment is available in the event of non-conformity. The principal negative sanction at Straight was the often repeated assertion by speaker after speaker that great misery would attend any re-entry into the drug culture. The motivation to stay drug free was reinforced through references to the unpleasant life of the confirmed drug user. This, we suppose, was a device not dissimilar to the evangelist's offer of eternal damnation; but at Straight it was not something that one had to accept on faith. It was the real thing because every member present had experienced it. The brimstone was in the recent and easily remembered past and it was not in any sense an irrational leap of faith to believe that a similar environment might have to be endured in the future. Apart from that

there was the withholding of advancement and its attendant privileges, and the understanding that temporary demotion to a lower phase was always possible.

This advancement is a vital element of the programme. It is a strongly positive sanction. The adolescent begins in Phase 1 without any rights or responsibilities. It is understood that as the drug is gradually metabolized and excreted he will be able, perhaps for the first time in years, to think clearly. For two weeks, accordingly, he participates in the sessions but he does not have any special rights or privileges. And then, in the course of time, and through the sought after concensus of his peers, he progresses through the five phases of the programme. The reward for relinquishing the interests and values of the drug user is always promotion to a higher level. Thus Straight emphasizes very potent sanctions of an altogether positive nature.

No one is abused physically, no one is denied food or rest, no one is publicly humiliated by having his head shaved or by having to sit in a corner or by having to wear a dunce cap. No such devices, from the threat of torture to the use of mechanical restraints or solitary confinement, are used at Straight.

Peer pressure is, of course, tremendously powerful; and this is a constant element in the programme; but this potent instrument is not, in our opinion, abused in any way. Misbehaviour is certainly not countenanced but it is always handled gently and with an astonishing amount of restraint and affection.

Our conclusion, with regard to the use of brainwashing techniques at Straight, was that one would have to broaden the definition of this word to the point of meaninglessness for it to be applied there.

Is Straight sadistic?

This question was a major one for us because we have observed much sadism in the human potential movement, and also in the cults, in recent years. Indeed the true brainwashers are determined to reduce their subjects to a condition of helpless dependence so that they can oversee their re-development in the manner desired by them. And in order to bring about a state of utter powerlessness many sadistic techniques may be used. At Straight the opportunity to cause extreme regression was certainly there, as it would be whenever a bewildered and possibly frightened person finds himself in an unfamiliar and quite structured environment. Indeed one of the first observations we made was the grasping of the belt loops of every first phase person whenever he had to move from one place to another. The rationale of this practice was based on the idea that the newcomer had established that his life was unmanageable. He needed, therefore, to have a hand on him wherever he went. This technique held within it the seed of much abuse and Straight would be well advised to watch it carefully. As it stands it is not really offensive and it lasts, in any case, for a relatively short period of time. It is obvious, however, that a director bent on cruel humiliation could hold that the newcomer had so abused his life as to have given up his right to be a human being. As such he would be required to crawl about on all fours or eat without benefit of utensils. The statement as it is currently made at Straight is acceptable but great care must be taken to check any evolution of this idea in the direction of outright sadism.

In another sense the group could conceivably be sadistic toward some person chosen, perhaps through his own disruptiveness, to be a target for special abuse. This potential exists in all human societies

and it is sometimes savage and relentless. Groups can be converted into dangerous instruments and, as such, they can become righteously uncompromising and unfeeling.

At Straight the possibility of such a development is checked in several ways. First of all there is a prevailing mood of tolerance and affection. It is a rule that no one may comment on another person behind his back. No one, moreover, is ever rewarded for unjustly attacking another person with his words. There appeared to be a great deal of sensitivity to this and the group was extraordinarily forgiving and supportive of the person thus offended.

Secondly, the form of the encounter was such that no one person could ever be singled out for more than a few minutes. The floor was constantly given to a sequence of people and this meant that no one ever had to endure the central position for very long. It might be argued, of course, that for greatest effect it would be desirable to alter this pattern so that a particularly resistant person might experience the full and extended onslaught of his fellows. This is the way it is done in most places where variants of the encounter are used; but Straight would be well advised to maintain its check on this potentially dangerous practice.

Thirdly there are frequent staff conferences in which there is detailed input from many people touching on the progress, and the vulnerability too, of everyone. At these meetings it is agreed that a particular person is in need of staff protection and, perhaps, even individual counselling; and it would be the responsibility of everyone to see that these things would be done.

And fourthly there is, in the various phases, input from foster parents, and later the parents themselves, that might reveal the need for

protection.

The Straight programme is intricately checked in these several ways and the result is a strong sense of safety and the feeling that good sense is liable to prevail. In fact the word that kept occurring to us in the course of this consultation was that Straight was humane. This means more than that its intentions were good; it means that there was a persistent desire to be decent and loving and an equally intense desire to avoid being hurtful or hateful.

Does Straight promote any particular religious system?

Straight is an accumulation of wisdom derived from many sources. One of these is Alcoholics Anonymous. The twelve steps of AA are condensed into seven steps at Straight; but the message is very much the same.

The first two steps are as follows:

1. Admit we were powerless over drugs and came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
2. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

There is absolutely no preaching of any kind at Straight. The organization has no religious affiliation and no creed peculiar to any particular religion. There are no church services and there is no pastoral counselling. The adolescents and the staff at Straight have diverse religious backgrounds but organized religion has no place in the programme. The Lord's Prayer is recited by the entire group, the concepts of God and of prayer are mentioned in several of the steps, and individual speakers may refer to religious experiences in their brief testimonials before the group; but beyond that there is no further emphasis. This,

in our opinion, is correct. It is an important check on the potential for cultism that is the next question to be considered.

### Is Straight a cult?

The word cult is, of course, very difficult to define. A number of organizations do, however, have certain characteristics in common that permit us to use this usually troubling term.

Cults tend to be exclusive. They are either splinter groups that have broken off from some established system or they are the creation de novo of some particularly charismatic person. In either case they are usually embattled early on because of their heretical, antisocial or isolationist beliefs and practices. The novitiates are encouraged to abandon the evil ways of their former friends and relatives and adopt instead the enlightened ideas of the leader. Strict obedience to the rules of the cult are required and no return to the general society may ever be contemplated. The cult is typically alienating and the devotees are caused to uncritically accept the idea that the cult is right in all things and the inclusive society is wrong.

Straight is relentlessly normative. Its stated goal is not any perpetual attachment to Straight but a gradual return to full and productive membership in the general society. Rather than advising the members that their parents are evil, Straight makes strong efforts to bridge the chasm that has opened between the child and his parents over the years. The goal is the re-establishment of the family unit. This is not the mark of the cult.

Straight is not a secret society. There are no arcane rites, no mysteries, no body of knowledge shared only by the initiates. On the

contrary Straight is an extraordinarily open society and it welcomes understanding.

But Straight is very powerful too. It has developed a number of practices that, in combination, are obviously very potent. Adolescent drug users are famously resistant to any sort of appeal to sobriety and yet we observed several hundred young people who gave every indication of being positively affected by the programme. The question arises, then, whether Straight could be subverted as have a number of other programmes in other parts of the country.

There is no doubt that the Board of Directors and the staff are all acutely aware of this problem and that they are determined to avoid it. This is admirable, and it would seem that they have built into the design of the programme a number of checks that would prevent the undesired evolution into an exclusive and inward turning cult.

Straight is determinedly rational. The adolescents are not subjected to either sensory bombardment or sensory deprivation. They are not rendered hungry, fatigued or physiologically unbalanced. They are never subjected to any form of isolation. They are exhorted only to think. They are told to use their heads and to respect the free and normal functioning of their minds. No cataclysmic conversions are promoted or desired. Nothing is done to bring about the altered state of consciousness that might lead to utter, blind devotion in an entirely mindless way.

Straight, furthermore, is a non-profit organization. No one benefits except through the payment of a salary to the staff members. The cult, as is well known, often leads to the enrichment of the leader. No one stands to become rich at Straight and this is as it should be.

And thirdly, the turnover of people at Straight would make it



very difficult for the organization to become progressively more powerful through recruitment. People enter, stay for weeks or months, and leave. They leave to re-enter the mainstream of society.

And the leaders. At the present time the staff members at the St. Petersburg location are outstanding. They know that this is so and they are justly proud of what they have achieved. But they are not megalomaniac. Not one of them gave the slightest indication that they harboured the hope that they might become rich, famous, or powerful. The morale was high, as far as we could see, but there was no enchantment with the experience of increasing influence. The staff, furthermore, had frequent meetings in which any tendency toward the development of cultishness would be spotted and checked. These meetings were not passionate, they were merely sensible; and there was no evidence whatsoever of messianism in even its most early forms.

And finally the Board of Directors is active and observant. This Board, wisely constituted and intensely interested, is in a position to detect and correct any shift in the direction of destructive cultism.

That is the way it is right now. But there is clearly the potential for a most disagreeable transformation that could lead to the end of this programme. If the present leadership should be replaced by other people who are less vigilant, less democratic, and less concerned to defend against the rise of a charismatic guru, then the transfiguration of this programme might well take place. The adolescents themselves, with the assistance of the junior and senior staffs, may well do most of the work in the daily sessions, but the leadership is crucial. At the moment this leadership is rational and humane and it evinces not the slightest interest in creating out of this programme a vehicle for personal aggrandizement. Even so we think it would be advisable for Straight to

take yet another look at Alcoholics Anonymous and discover how that organization has managed to maintain itself for decades without any signs of devolution. It is, of course, the twelve traditions of AA that prevent any adverse changes from occurring. A similar group of traditions should be prepared by Straight; a constitution, if you like, a written system of laws that could not be changed without much careful consideration and without the agreement of the executive staff and the Board of Directors.

There is no problem in St. Petersburg. The problem is far more liable to arise in one of the satellite programmes that are certain to be opened in distant cities over the years. There should be, accordingly, a very strong central office and this office should maintain tight control over the satellites even as these outlying programmes develop certain characteristics peculiar to their diverse regions.

In any case our conclusion was that the St. Petersburg Straight could not, in any sense at all, be correctly described as a cult.

#### Can Straight be transplanted?

Yes, providing it jumps from city to city in precisely the way it did to Sarasota and Atlanta. That is to say a nucleus of children and parents moving through the various phases becomes large enough to permit the transfer of this entire segment to the home city under the leadership of a carefully chosen director.

An important part of this is, of course, the training of staff members who work with the children who will eventually be transferred and who move with the group when it departs to establish the satellite. This procedure is ponderous but it is very sensible and orderly. It is by far the most effective way of setting up a viable satellite. The problem

with it is that it will come under much criticism by people in distant cities who will hear about Straight and who will importune the organization for the sudden establishment of new centres. We predict that this will happen but we have no doubt that any relaxation of the guidelines that now exist will result in deterioration and disappointment. The delays will not be unconscionable. If Atlanta, for example, should thrive there is no reason why it could not begin to collect a number of children from another city. The growth of Straight could be, in that case, quite adequate; and its quality could be safely controlled.

There will be imitators, we have no doubt; and many of these will be distressing. Straight should be willing to advise any serious programme but it should be prepared to disclaim any responsibility for the work of any programme that does not maintain a sufficiently high standard of quality. Straight, after all, represents the state of the art; and one of its great responsibilities will be to remain exemplary and as helpful as possible. Everything should be available to everyone except for one thing: the name Straight should be carefully guarded and assigned only to bone fide satellites of the original programme.

#### Does Straight advance a magic humanist philosophy?

There are certain values that seem to make social living more harmonious, more safe and more productive for the majority of the people. The society must expect adherence to certain general principles or else social disruption and much unhappiness will certainly be the result.

Nevertheless the diversity that is found in any group of people suggests that it would be unwise to think that it would be possible, or even desirable, to expect the universal attainment of some hypothetical

ideal. The magic humanist, who is often well meaning, is inclined to think that such a goal is reasonable. He is a humanist, all right, but he is unrealistic. His hopes for man outreach the possibility of realization. His thinking is woolly, utopian and magical, and his programmes are potentially dangerous.

Straight, for its part, has no illusions. It is obviously not in the business of creating saints or even uniformly right thinking citizens. Straight, it seemed to us, was in the business of offering hope to as many young people and their families as it could. And this hope having been gained would be the essential benefit that its graduates could take with them on their return to the outside world. We listened hard but we heard no unrealistic or magic humanist thought at Straight. This was a further indication that this organization was in no danger of becoming a cult.

#### Is parental involvement essential?

It is very difficult to criticize this element of the programme because it is obviously an integral part of the plan as it now exists. The parents are caused to give the programme their intense support. In every case a great deal of personal sacrifice is expected and, we gathered, gained. In fact it was apparent that a child might well be discharged from the programme in the event of non-involvement on the part of the parents. This is excellent as far as it goes and it will obviously go far. There are certainly enough children with truly concerned and dedicated parents to carry Straight for a long time to come. And it is clear that the involvement of the parents is a powerful stimulus to the children who are attempting to rid themselves of their burdensome condition. It was

remarkable, in fact, to see children who had utterly dismissed their parents in the past express, after just a few weeks, an intense desire to simply talk to these previously despised and rejected people. Straight is obviously much interested in the idea of the strong and mutually supportive family. The child may be returned to the community and to the school but, above all, he is returned to the family. This is an admirable goal but what troubled us was that it did not accommodate to the serious problems of the child who had been utterly rejected by his family either before or after his use of drugs. At some time in the future some way may be found for the admission of children who have parents who are either physically or psychologically absent from their lives. Such children should not be deprived of the benefits that flow from Straight even though it is likely that the most favourable prognoses will occur in the cases of children who have families that have the potential for unity.

The concept of the foster home, as it is now employed at Straight, might become the basis of an extended relationship in the cases of those children who do not and never will have an interested parent.

### Is Straight scientific?

No, it is not. Its ideas have come from various places, some of them scientific, and some of these have been exhaustively studied in other places. But Straight is not oriented toward science. Just as it offers no miraculous pseudo-religious cures so does it avoid making any claims for miraculous pseudo-scientific cures. It says, instead, that it is all hard, practical, personal work and the reward for patience and persistence is a more comfortable and more productive life.

The problem, of course, is that Straight really does not know what happens to a good many of its graduates. And it will be criticized for this in the future. And this really is a problem because the alternative may be just as dangerous. Straight could hire an increasingly large Evaluation Studies Department just as have most of the drug programmes in the country. This bureaucratic operation might easily become overbearing and demanding, and the weight of interest could shift from doing the clinical work of re-acculturation to that of carrying out progressively more esoteric studies on diverse subjects.

At first glance it would certainly seem to be desirable to know exactly what degree of success is being achieved by various sorts of people; but the experience of many organizations is that this shift in interest has a deleterious effect on the basic programme that existed in the beginning. Perhaps the best and safest answer would be for Straight to have very little to do with evaluations of this sort or with any other kind of research. Instead it would encourage universities or governments to undertake this increasingly more expensive task. Straight is not rich and so it should remain. To do all the intricate work of the anthropologists, the psychologists and the epidemiologists would be to necessitate the creation of a vast bureaucracy. Straight would be well advised to keep its professional staff to a minimum and permit itself to be studied, evaluated and perhaps validated by extramural agencies. It is not that such studies are unimportant. It is just that there is a tendency for clinical operations to introduce research functions and find, in the end, that the latter have become dominant and terminally expensive. The spontaneity and resourcefulness of the well run self-help organization are usually injured by scientists. These learned people are inclined to be suspicious of such unpredictable

variables, and their efforts to control that which they deplore are often counter-productive.

Having said all this we must hasten to add that the recent hiring of a single person to maintain contact with graduated families is perfectly desirable. The burden of his work will be clinical and consonant with the rest of the programme. He will find out, for example, whether there is a felt need for refresher weekends. He will no doubt look into the possibility of setting up regular or occasional group discussions in places other than the Straight building. He may help to clarify the role of the very advanced people called Seventh Steppers in the wider society. And he will generally work to maintain the spirit and presence of Straight among those who have passed through the phases and have moved back into the community.

All this is more than acceptable. Our warning alludes only to the looming bureaucracy that would unbalance the elegant and very human structure of the organization as it now exists.

#### Does Straight turn out zombies?

Having worked in the drug field for many years we know what burnt out people can look like. Having studied cults for some time we also know what dependent devotees tend to look like. Both of these groups present members who lack sparkle, natural brightness, and an agreeable range of affect. They often seem automatic and their responses are either dulled or transparently doctrinaire.

We saw these things at Straight but we saw them among the people who had only recently joined the group. As the children progressed through the various phases they seemed to be positively more alert and

spontaneous. The people in the most advanced stages seemed to have regained their humanity. They had humour, resilience and high spirits. They just seemed to be normal adolescents. They were not paragons, not saints; but they were positively not zombies. A brief aside: we went for lunch to a restaurant some distance from the building. And the waitress said, quite cheerily, "You're from Straight." We said we were and she told us that she was too and that she had seen us there. She was in Phase 4 and was on one of her day's off and therefore working in the restaurant. She was friendly, at ease, and in absolutely no sense zombie-like.

Are the children with what Straight calls responsibility simply being slaves?

One of the rewards for progress in the system is the attainment of responsibility. Thus a large amount of the caretaking around the building is actually done by higher phase people. They are not paid for this and therefore they have been called forced labourers. They do it, however, gladly and voluntarily. They know that the way to their return to the society involves doing the useful and thoughtful things that they have avoided doing for years. And this procedure is perfectly healthy and desirable. It contains, of course, a hazard; and the staff must be very careful regarding this problem. The higher phase people might conceivably attempt to offer their services to staff members for future considerations. This would be disastrous for the integrity of the programme. Or similarly, but even more dangerously, a staff member might request a higher phase person to undertake some task for his, the staff member's, personal advantage.



No special privileges should ever be offered to a person as a reward for personal service to a staff member.

Of additional interest is the fact that the parents, who are regarded as part of the Straight community, are also asked to do various jobs. Thus when we were there there was a call for parents to lay carpets, paint walls and assist in many other ways. A great deal of car driving is contributed by the parents and, of course, parents who have children who have gained the privilege of returning home are required to accept the immense responsibility of being foster parents for newcomers. No one would hold, we dare say, that these parents have been turned into slaves. The participating children are involved in similar exhibitions of community support. The notion that any of these people have become some modern equivalent of the indentured servant is insupportable and absurd. This is a self-help programme and it is not surprising, therefore, that everybody helps.

Is the lack of government sponsorship noticeable at Straight?

Yes it is. Any government branch that we have ever seen has suffered, inevitably, sooner rather than later, from the dread effects of Parkinson's Law. Officials breed officials and there never seems to be any Malthusian end to it, especially if the field of work is in the social sciences. Straight is positively spartan and so it should remain. It asks at the parents meeting if any parent present can possibly supply a 40 foot hose. And it gets the hose. If the government ran Straight there would be an abundance of hoses of every possible calibre and length, a warehouse to store the hoses, a staff to guard, classify and dispense the hoses, and a pilot study to determine the utility of having

so many hoses. But most importantly no parent would experience the small joy of being able to supply one perfectly necessary 40 foot hose.

Straight is exemplary in that it appears to do everything that it wants to do with great economy. For vast engineering projects the involvement of the government is essential; for endeavours in the field of social science the maintenance of the human scale is decidedly preferable.

### Is Straight authoritarian?

Yes it is. At Straight there is a clearly defined chain of command that runs from the director all the way through to the newcomer. Every decision is made by the members at a certain level and confirmed by the decreasing number of members at the various higher levels. Straight is pyramidal in design. Most of the decisions are made at levels appropriate to the significance of the issue but certain matters must be approved by the director alone. And the utmost deference and respect is accorded the members of each higher level. This recognition of authority in this particular example of a meritocracy is an altogether novel experience for most of these young people and it is not harmful to them in any way. It must be remembered that their stay at Straight is of a limited duration and they are not condemned to an interminable life of unchanging status. They constantly progress upward through the pyramid and in a matter of months they are back at work or school. The programme is strict but it is eminently humane and fair; and this combination is one of the reasons for its success. Some comprehension of discipline is, after all, a useful attribute in one's future transactions with one's self and with the social world. No one is

injured by the orderliness of Straight.

Should Straight accept grants?

Government grants, no, because this would probably entail incalculable amounts of government paperwork. Anything that leads to the facilitation of the growth of bureaucracy should be carefully avoided. It is lethal to morale and effectiveness.

Foundation grants, probably yes, because such organizations usually require far fewer bureaucratic satisfactions. Although it is not unfortunate that Straight is poor there is no doubt that a good deal of money is going to be required to construct, elsewhere, the sort of building that now exists in St. Petersburg. Public donations, fees from the participants, and plenty of free hoses, yes, but there may still be a need for occasional large inputs of money for capital building purposes. And, in particular, there is a need for extra money to supply bursaries for children whose parents simply do not have the necessary funds to pay for admission. Straight does some of this now, but there is a need for much more of it.

Is the programme anti-intellectual?

The children at Straight do not engage in the sort of intellectual pursuits that might be found at a school or university. They do not, for that matter, even read books or watch television programmes devoted to ideas. They are not there for the purpose of expanding their knowledge of intellectual affairs. They are there, nevertheless, to exercise their intelligences. The programme is extremely rational but it is also very simple and direct. It is pragmatic

and it honours clear-headedness. In this sense it is basic training for any intellectual pursuit in the future.

### Is Straight biased in favour of white children?

The workers at Straight are acutely aware of the fact that nearly all of their children have been from the white middle class. This is clearly not their desire but they are certain to be criticized for this in the future. An even greater effort must obviously be made to interest black parents and black children in the programme at Straight. There have been a few black children at Straight in the past but during the time we were in St. Petersburg there was not a single one. A more representative population is certain to be achieved in time because the desire is clearly there; but in the meantime greater attempts must be made to improve the credibility of Straight in the black community.

It was agreeable to note that there were a fair number of Hispanic children and parents in the group; and we understood, furthermore that there was a wide range of incomes throughout the entire group. The plan, already in existence, whereby children from less affluent families are assisted is, as we have noted previously, only to be encouraged. Drug affliction is not class specific; Straight must not be either.

### Does Straight violate children's rights?

We did not perceive this as being the case. People under 18 are admitted because their parents are fully supportive of this action. The children themselves, being children, are not mature and they had

managed to interrupt their lives very seriously through their use of drugs. We do not see how it would benefit these children for them to be permitted to pursue their dangerous careers as drug users without some parentally sanctioned intervention. It does not do any damage to these children to be admitted to Straight for a period of a few weeks or months; and after that they are either discharged because they are utterly unwilling to participate or they recognize that the programme might even help them, and they decide to stay on.

On admission they do not have much desire to interrupt their daily use of drugs, but it seems to us that it is a gross perversion of the humane impulse to hold that their civil right to ruin themselves as adolescents should be honoured over their distressed parents right to insist that they be given a decent opportunity to live full and happy lives for many years to come. The same principle applies to the children who are 18 or a very few years older. They can leave after a certain number of limited delays; but they are not hurt by being in this drug free environment for a few weeks. The drugged state is, in fact, more injurious than is the endurance of a short, discontented stay at Straight. This programme gives them a chance to get detoxified in a receptive and non-threatening society of their peers. If they are utterly recalcitrant and feel they must return to the use of drugs then, with regret, they are discharged.

It should be noted here that every child under the age of 18 is dealt with, in an intake interview, by two higher phase people who have had similar experiences as drug users. All of the rules and practices are described; and in every case the newcomer signs a paper that indicates his agreement to stay for 14 days. After 14 days have passed most children are so drug free and so satisfied with the goals of

the programme that they decide to continue through the rest of the phases. Children over 18 similarly sign themselves in and if they refuse to do so they are not admitted. This procedure is perfectly just, and it is not violative of anybody's rights.

Is there any protection against mental breakdown?

In any population there are always some people who suffer from diverse psychiatric illnesses. In a group of confirmed drug users the incidence of illness is even higher. Furthermore it has often been noticed that the daily use of drugs can screen an underlying illness. The drug culture is highly tolerant of aberrant modes of thinking, feeling and acting, and a person may exist in such a community for some time before he is identified as having not just a drug problem but a psychiatric disturbance. For these reasons it was gratifying to learn that a fully accredited psychiatrist was associated with Straight and that anyone who showed signs of an emotional disturbance that was not clearly referable to drug use was seen by this person. Straight is not equipped to deal with clinical illness. It is not a hospital; and therefore it is essential that people who are in need of hospitalization should be referred to such facilities.

Apart from psychiatric assistance Straight also has close associations with other medical people. Straight is primarily a self-help organization but it is not so unwise as to reject the help of professionals.

The medical support at St. Petersburg was excellent. Any branch in another city should establish from the beginning a similar network of local professionals.

## Conclusion

In conclusion we would like to make several further observations. It is true that Straight does not have any accurate data indicating the ultimate success of its programme. Large numbers of graduates are known to be free of drugs but acceptable statistical analyses are not available. It is worth noting, however, that in our experience a significant number of people who are exposed to guidance of some kind but who relapse subsequently actually do remember a great deal of what they learned; and they make use of this knowledge at a later date when they are finally ready to benefit from it. The point here is that even short range failures may have been aided in many ways.

And another point: in the schools today there is a widespread acceptance of drug use as a natural and desirable mode of being in the world. The peer pressure urging this style is intense and it is very difficult for a child to resist it and remain a part of the group. One of the most important contributions that Straight might make, therefore, is the offer of strong support to those children who are really disinclined to use drugs but who are constantly urged to do so by their friends. In this sense Straight, through its literature and through its example, would serve to strengthen the determination of a great many children who might never have any direct association with it.

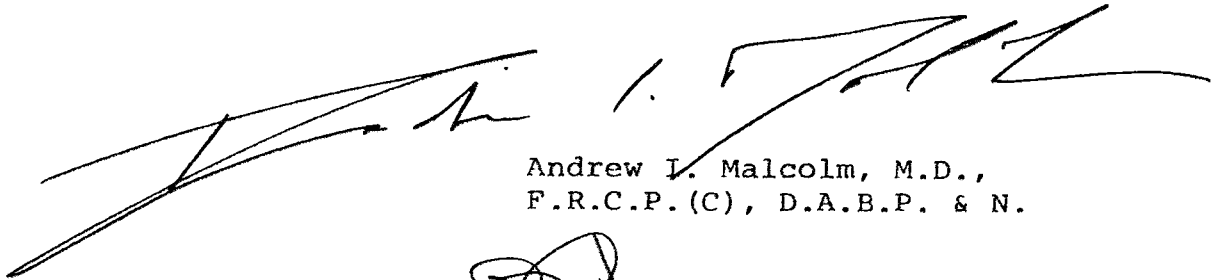
Straight seemed to us to be phenomenal. We have been involved in drug programmes, we have seen far more of them, and we have read about most of them; but we have never seen a programme that seemed so intelligently designed to bring about success in this very difficult field.

At the end of his excellent book, Gone Way Down, Miller Newton makes several observations concerning the elements that must be gathered

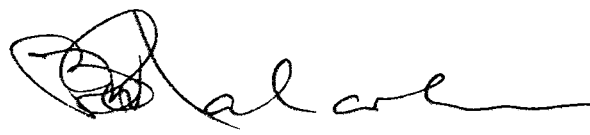
together if a drug treatment programme is to be successful. In brief these are:

1. In choosing a programme for the teenager, make sure that it takes an abstinence position as necessary for recovery.
2. A successful programme is able to keep the child in a drug free environment.
3. Those who have the problem can best be helped by others who have the problem and are recovering.
4. Good programmes involve the total family, parents and siblings, in treatment from the beginning.
5. Effective programmes also take a strong position that a person has to make the decision to help himself.
6. Recovery requires a strong and structured approach.
7. The programme should reintegrate the teenager back into his family, school and other social activities.
8. Becoming and remaining drug free involves changing one's thinking, feeling and behaviour. Cognitive and/or rational therapy seems to be most effective in this kind of self change.

We agree fully that these eight criteria are crucial elements in any really serious programme. Straight is serious and Straight incorporates all of them. Straight, we are inclined to suspect, is going to be recognized, eventually, as a national resource.



Andrew L. Malcolm, M.D.,  
F.R.C.P.(C), D.A.B.P. & N.



Barbara E. Malcolm, B.A.

Toronto, September 5, 1981.



## REPORT ON CLASS ACTION SUIT AGAINST STRAIGHT INC., SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA

## o General Overview

The suit was filed by Fred Collins Jr., a 20 year old resident of Virginia previously enrolled in the St. Petersburg, Florida program and moved back to Virginia when the program opened in October.

Collins is represented by the law firm of Hirschkop and Grad. The suit was filed in U.S. District Court, Alexandria, Virginia.

Collins is asking for injunctive and monetary relief, and brought the suit as a class action. The class he is asking to be certified consists of everyone that has ever been in Straight Inc.

## o Specific Complaints

- A) That Straight is enrolling individuals in the program under duress and without obtaining their permission.
- B) That Straight is subjecting individuals to physical and psychological abuse.
- C) That Straight is preventing individuals from leaving the program against their will.

## o Straight's Position

The allegations are false.

- 1) There is no duress as each potential client must voluntarily sign a treatment agreement form and the parents must voluntarily sign an admission agreement form. The program rules and procedures are explained fully to the client and parents before the forms are signed. Specifically, Collins intake interview lasted three hours, of which 1½ hours of paperwork was involved. The intake proceedings are supervised by executive staff. The intake procedures are constantly under review by the staff, State agencies where the programs operate, outside consultants, and the media.
- 2) Straight does not subject clients to physical abuse. The only time restraint must be used is when a client becomes physically abusive to other clients in the program. Straight has treated more than three thousand clients and has never had one serious injury resulting from the use of physical restraint. Drug dependent people can be prone to be physically aggressive, which cannot be permitted in a room full of people. The physical eruptions are rare, they have occurred, but were always handled in a restraining manner.
- 3) Clients are not subjected to psychological abuse. This is a common complaint by the non-professional against the technique of group

confrontation which Straight uses so the client will recognize honesty is essential to becoming drug-free. The program is under constant scrutiny of qualified third party professionals, such as:

Dr. Robert DuPont  
American Council on Marijuana  
6193 Executive Boulevard  
Rockville, Maryland 20015

Dr. Andrew Malcom  
55 Queen Street, East - Suite 1402  
Toronto, Canada M5C 1R5

Dr. Sharon Wegscheider  
OnSite  
1645 Hennepin Avenue, Suit 206  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403

Jack Sarmanian, A.C.S.W.  
330 Bedford Street  
Lexington, Massachusetts 02173

Not one of these professionals has ever found any psychological abuse.

- 4) Straight has been challenged before, that they were holding clients against their will. As in any treatment facility, there is a specific exit procedure which involves counseling the client with the parents and staff. Straight does not simply have an "open door" any time a client decides they do not want to be there. Straight has an obligation to the parents to do their utmost in restoring their child to a drug-free life style. The exit procedure has been carefully scrutinized and has always been upheld.
- 5) The charges against the Washington program are not new ones. The same issues have been levied in St. Petersburg, Atlanta, and Cincinnati. Straight has been cleared in each case.

Fred Collins Jr. asked the court for an injunction to prevent Straight from doing A, B & C further. The court, based upon a hearing of both sides, refused to issue the injunction.

Keith Stroup, former Director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) is apparently involved. It is not known exactly to what extent.

Fred Collins parents feel devastated, and will appear as witnesses for Straight. His younger brother has chosen to remain in Straight.

Straight has treated more than three thousand young people and 60% are drug-free today. The typical adolescent drug treatment programs have a success rate of 3 to 18 percent.

William D. Oliver, Executive Director of Straight Inc. has offered to come to Washington and answer any questions.

Enclosed are copies of newspaper articles reporting on the same kind of charges brought in other cities.

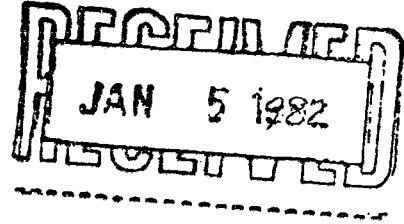
Andrew I. Malcolm, M.D., F.R.C.P. (C)

55 Queen Street East, Suite 1402

366-1083 - Toronto M5C 1R5 - 481-7983

December 26, 1981.

Mr. James E. Hartz  
Executive Director  
Straight, Inc.  
P. O. Box 40052  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33743  
U. S. A.



Dear Mr. Hartz,

Last August my wife and I spent six days at Straight in St. Petersburg. This consultation was a most rewarding and re-assuring experience because we found that, in many ways, Straight was remarkable.

Although we were familiar with many kinds of drug programmes for adolescents we had never before seen a programme that satisfied all of the criteria that seemed to us to be essential for success.

Straight is strictly drug free and it emphasizes, in a most positive way, the advantages of the drug free state. It is a programme that encourages the active participation of not only the young people but also their parents. It encourages self reliance and personal responsibility, and its main object is to help adolescents to return to the community in a drug free state, and armed with a revived interest in their families and in the crucial necessity of making the fullest use of their own natural abilities.

Straight encourages rational thought. The programme is carefully designed to check any evolution in the direction of irrational cultism; and it was quite clear to us that the adolescents were strongly encouraged to exercise their minds. They were not caused to become dependent on the programme; they were stimulated to become dependent on themselves as free citizens of a democratic society.

Before we went to St. Petersburg we learned that Straight had been criticized on the grounds that it made use of

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brainwashing techniques. We examined this issue carefully and our fuller opinion is set forth in our report. Our conclusion, however, was that to use this word in describing the programme at Straight would be absurd. Straight simply does not engage in brainwashing.

In our opinion Straight satisfies every one of the essential requirements of the ideal treatment approach for adolescent drug users, a population that is, incidentally, very resistant to treatment. If a young person is to be motivated to break free of the burden of drug affliction he would have a better chance at Straight than he would have at any other programme on the Continent that we have either seen or are otherwise familiar with.

And Straight goes about doing its vitally important work without any government support. This, too, is extraordinary, admirable and necessary. Its autonomy is an important element in the maintenance of its simplicity and effectiveness.

As we have said elsewhere we feel very strongly that Straight must rely on the fees paid by the parents for the day to day running of its individual branches. There is a great need, however, for the establishment of new branches, and this will clearly involve the expenditure of amounts of money that could never be accumulated from fees alone. Support for such expansions should be derived from foundations and corporations that have come to recognize that Straight is unique, responsible, well controlled and extraordinarily effective.

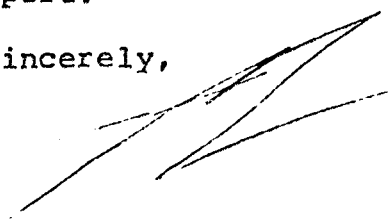
And we have no doubt that you are going to be hard pressed by distraught people in every part of the country when the word gets around that you are doing something that is not being done with such downright good sense anywhere else. These people are going to importune you to establish satellites; but two factors will inhibit any rapid expansion: you must have time to carefully select and train the satellite staffs, and you must have money. We know you can deal with the first of these because you have proven this in both Sarasota and Atlanta. And we suspect that money

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is going to be forthcoming, from diverse sources,  
for a programme as enlightened and as nationally  
necessary as is that of Straight.

We wish you much success in all your endeavours.  
We know you deserve the strongest support.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew I. Malcolm, M.D.  
F.R.C.P.(C), D.A.B.P. & N.