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TRIUMPHS

Changing the lives of teen addicts

Southfield treatment center a success

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BY NAOMI R. PATTON
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Textbooks lined the shelves in the small classroom filled with nearly a dozen desks and tables. Artwork hung from the ceilings and walls.

The seven students, ages 16-18, were attending a college and career-planning workshop.

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But the workshop, held last week, wasn't entirely typical. It was being held at the Pathway Family Center in Southfield, and the students are all recovering drug addicts.

Matt Pilarski has attended the workshop more than once. Pilarski, 18, of Northville Township is to graduate from Pathway in a month, and he'll attend Schoolcraft College in the fall.

In the workshop, he's impressed by what he has learned about Qualigence, the Livonia-based recruitment research firm running the workshop. He said he has been inspired and "just wants to be a success."

Terri Nissley started Pathway in 1993 with a group of parents, 13 clients and \$5,000, when her own daughter's substance abuse treatment center closed because of a lack of funding.

"I wasn't thinking about the thousands of kids that come after," Nissley said. "We took what we had and professionalized it."

Today, Nissley's daughter is 31 and drug-free with her own family, and Nissley is the chief executive officer and president of Pathway, which has treatment centers for kids ages 13-18 in Southfield, Indiana and Ohio. "We look at the entire family as the client," Nissley said. "This is a very intense level of care."

The center's staff includes board-certified physicians, clinical psychologists, therapists, registered nurses and certified teachers.

A study conducted in 1999 by the University of Detroit Mercy found that 82% of the clients and parents surveyed reported being clean and sober within one to three years of graduating from the program.

In 2003, Pathway also was recognized by Washington, D.C.-based Drug Strategies, a national research institute promoting effective drug abuse treatment.

Bruce Stork's son Ian is about to graduate from Pathway. A year ago, he suspected his son was using drugs. For months, there was erratic, belligerent behavior, and shouting matches.

"My wife and I felt like if we didn't do something, we would be going to his funeral or his brain would be fried, or he would end up in jail," said Stork, 51, of New Baltimore.

Going forward, Stork knows how difficult it is for addicts not to relapse, but he said he believes Pathway has given his son and his family a "toolbox ... he's got a leg up. ...I think he's prepared."

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PHOTOS

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(SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press)

Joe Edwards, 16, of White Lake Township listens last week during a workshop for recovering teen drug addicts at the Pathway Family Center in Southfield. The seminar gave information about college and career planning. One teen said the workshop "sparked something in my head."

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Before Pathway, Ian Stork, 17, never thought about college. Now, a senior at Warren Fitzgerald High School and month from graduating from Pathway, he's thinking about it, and he said the workshop "sparked something in my head."

"I just have a better understanding of how life works," Ian said.

Learn more at www.pathwayfamilycenter.org. Contact **NAOMI R. PATTON** at 313-223-4485 or npatton@freepress.com.

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