



Sergeant Michael Sweet, Lancaster County Sheriff's office, displays marijuana confiscated in drug raids

## Full Circle Is 'Tough love'



Ron Ruhnke, Full Circle halfway house director

# Full Circle session: understanding, patience

Sitting in a circle on the shag-carpeted floor of one of the rooms in the Full Circle House, you feel the family snugness of the setting, the good vibrations of the house, and the dynamic energies of the young people in the room.

They are talking about what most want more than anything, their freedom. One by one they are explaining what they'll do on that great day when they can walk out the door.

The Full Circle program is a drug rehabilitation project and the young people engaged in the discussion are all former drug abusers, most assigned to the house as part of the terms of some probation plan.

Through their experience with the Full Circle program, these half-dozen teenagers are accustomed to group discussions. They are polite to one another. They give everyone a chance to speak and they treat one another with understanding and patience.

### Easily available

They sound overly-bright for teenagers, but as one of the young women explains "dope makes you mature fast."

One of the Full Circle counselors comments on it in another way. "If you want to regard intelligence as primarily the means to figure out how to get what you want in life, these people are generally higher than average," he said, "they always knew how to get what they wanted!"

'Tough Love' is a means of bringing drug abusers to honest evaluations of their own lives. When it works it leads to a process of self-medication.

'Tough Love' is what counselors and house members living at the Full Circle House on the corner of 26th and N Sts. call their rehabilitation method.

"We use the toughness to make the individual take responsibility for his own life," explained the house director, "and the love is the part that helps in the healing."

Full Circle is a drug rehabilitation center sponsored by the Lincoln Council on Alcoholism and Drugs. At the house, everyone goes by first names, and the director is known simply as "Ron."

"Most people here have used a number of drugs heavily," he explained. Currently the house is filled to capacity with polydrug abusers.

### Intensive work

The Full Circle approach does not employ any form of medical detoxification, Ron said. During the adjustment period for a new house member, when he may be suffering withdrawal symptoms, the drug abuser is encouraged to settle into the house routine slowly. Four tablespoons of raw honey are prescribed per day to help the newcomer fight a craving for drugs.

"When their bodies get used to being without drugs," Ron said, "then it's time to start the more intensive work."

Evenings, Monday through Thursday, are set aside for group therapy and group awareness sessions. Featured are training periods in muscle relaxing and breathing exercises. One counselor teaches a massage class.

An individual also has three private counseling periods each week as well as a follow-up group session once a week. If he is an out-patient who does not live at the house, the Full Circle client spends from two to eight hours a day at the house working on various rehabilitation projects.

### Clientele busy

"We generally have to keep the clients at something most of the time," Ron said. "Drug rehabilitation is the most difficult type of rehabilitation there is."

On Friday evenings the members engage in some in-house social activity such as a sing-along or a series of games. These programs help to develop a sense of social ease in group situations for individuals who have never before achieved simple enjoyment in a social setting, the director explained.

On Saturday, the morning is reserved for housecleaning, the afternoon is for some physical activity such as a ball game or a hike, and the evening is set aside for an activity away from the house such as a play, movie or round of miniature golf.

"On the weekend, we try to put in practice what we teach all week," said Ron.

One weekend activity is a Sunday afternoon communications exercise in which the Full Circle residents are paired off for two or three hours to simply talk to one another as openly as possible.

### Di-ads help

"We have discovered that once a person leaves here and goes back out into the world," Ron said, "he needs better communication skills than the average person."

He explained the Sunday sessions, which they call "di-ads," are one more exercise to develop those skills.

Some of the rehabilitation patients go to school while living at the house, others work, and still others stay at the house all the time. Most people stay at the house for three or four months before becoming out-patients.

The Full Circle process of in-patient,

out-patient, and finally, follow-up client is a continuing system of counseling which saves on release problems, Ron said.

Generally, once a young person is released from the house, he said, the main problem which has to be overcome is one of intense loneliness.

### Psychological pain

"A former drug abuser needs to develop friends with the same values he has recently acquired, and with the same lifestyle and humanism," he said. "Having to face the tasks of living, relating, and of being alone is not easy for them. It's very hard!"

With a newcomer, Ron said, the counselors look for conflict problems, both within the individual and with others.

"Most drug abusers are extremely sensitive to psychological pain," he said, "which is a product of their drug use."

"We try to get them to understand what things have kept them from being the person they were meant to be," he said. "And, everyone, when they first arrive has their games, their cons, routines and facades."

One means of breaking down psychological blocks, Ron said, is an emphasis on body therapy. Patients are encouraged to find expression through their bodies, and a lot of pounding, shouting and rolling is practiced at the house as a means of letting strong emotions surface.

### Bio-energy

"We do a lot with the bio-energetic approach," he said.

Using the 'tough love' formula, the counselors work for total honesty in rehabilitation therapy, the director said. Therapy consists of some limited meditation, some fantasy exposure techniques and elements of body awareness and control.

"There aren't any complete systems for rehabilitating drug users," the director explained. "Each one works at a little different level, but something is clear in every case. People give up drugs because they want to, because they find a better way to live."

Many drug abusers want to change but don't, Ron said. "The old life is familiar to them. It may be painful, but at least it's known, so they'll stick with it rather than face something new and hard."

And, many of the people at the house can eventually make a decision to live a drug-free life he said, "The test is when they get back out and are with old friends or have to face old problems."

### Hurt shows

"Often when people come here," he said, "they are hurting, and it shows. But after they're here for a while, they feel safe. And they suddenly realize, that without drugs, they feel better than they ever have before. They think that everything is all right. That's when the hard work really begins."

A houseful of drug abusers aged 16 through 28 can provide reinforcement for many rehabilitation techniques, Ron said, or it can have just the opposite effect.

"Sometimes they can help one another," he said, "or they can all resist the program together."

The Full Circle project is funded by the city, Lancaster County, the State Crime Commission and by the Junior League, Kiwanis, and several local churches.

House members who work while undergoing the program contribute 20 per cent of their take-home pay to the support of the place.

The Full Circle program employs five counselors plus two nighttime counselors, and maintains a 24-hour-a-day crisis line.

Drugs are extremely easy to find, the people in the circle report, and for those who live in the house and leave to attend high school classes, each day is filled with many temptations. But, they say, they also have the opportunity to see their environment in ways they couldn't before.

Now, they say, they can see the ego-games and petty deceptions they used to play on themselves by watching others go through the same routines.

It is easy to tell which of the young people have been in the program awhile and which are newcomers. The veterans are a little more open, have a little more to say and are generally more relaxed.

### Captors hated

The people who have been in the house only a few days or weeks have less to say, keep more to themselves, and when they do speak, generally show themselves to be more in touch with the drug-oriented world they left behind a short while before.

Each veteran or new-kid-on-the-block has a story to tell about how to poison a body with drugs, and each tells it with honesty and sometimes wit.

And if most of the young people in the circle are glad they are not now taking drugs, still they have in common an animosity toward those who caught them. Many want to talk about the manner in which they were "trapped by the law."

A common theme among those who have

complaints against the police holds that narcotics officers are little better than the people they pursue. Such officers, they say, take drugs, illegally confiscate money and drugs and harass young people.

One young man from a small Nebraska town says his path to drug abuse was the result primarily of boredom. Most of his high school classmates are using drugs, he says, and the local residents don't know how to cope with the problem.

The young man said he is fortunate to have the opportunity to stay with the program at Full Circle. His alternative is the state penitentiary.

When speaking of those who sold them drugs, individuals in this circle have some difficulty establishing exactly how they feel. They are not ready to turn dealers in to the police, yet they would rather dealers ceased to exist.

One young woman says she started using a variety of drugs four years ago, when she was 13-years-old. Without placing blame or responsibility on any other person, place or thing, she states frankly, "I can't handle drugs."

Sitting in a circle late one afternoon with a group of young people who know a lot about self-destruction, who each stepped back from the brink to gain a chance at self-awareness here in this comfortable old house.

This place is good for them, they tell you, and they mean it, but it is not the endall of their dreams.