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New York Times (1857-Current file); Aug 30, 1964; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times
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Synanon Helps Community in Assisting Teen-Agers

By THEODORE JONES

The northeast Bronx community of Pelham Bay has joined forces with a national organization of former narcotic addicts to help eliminate addiction among teen-agers.

Two years ago the residents of the predominantly Italian area discovered that an alarming number of their teen-agers were either addicts or close to becoming addicts.

"We knew then that we had a problem, and that something had to be done and fast," the Rev. Herbert D'Argenio, a

leader of the community's anti-narcotics campaign, explained yesterday.

Father D'Argenio who is in charge of youth activities at St. Theresa's Church started an education campaign.

"It was more a matter of shocking them out of their apathy" the 31-year-old priest said, "and to get them to realize that it wasn't 'impossible here' and that moving out of the area would not solve the problem."

Father D'Argenio found help in James Brancato, a 53-year-old retired laborer whose son, Ronald, had become a narcotics addict.

Mr. Brancato had seen his son go through several detoxification treatments without much success and had decided to seek the help of the Synanon Foundation, which he had read about in a newspaper article.

Mr. Brancato entered his son in the program and after a few weeks was so pleased that he became the Synanon represen-

tative in the Pelham Bay community.

The Synanon movement, modeled somewhat after Alcoholics Anonymous, provides addicts with a continuing program of group living and self-help. No medications are used and the addict must begin a complete withdrawal.

The foundation, a nonprofit organization operated by former addicts, has three centers in California, one in Reno, Nev., and a receiving station in Westport, Conn., where addicts from the East Coast are screened.

"Ronnie was sort of a test case for this community," Mr. Brancato said. "His pals were waiting for him to come home and join the act again. When he didn't, they started asking me about him and the program. That's when I'd ask them what they were waiting for."

The parents of the addicts also became interested. In the last two years, 46 youths from

the community have been sent to the Synanon Foundation.

The Pelham Bay residents, led by Father D'Argenio and Mr. Brancato, also started a fund-raising campaign to help the foundation. Through two large benefits and several social gatherings they were able to contribute almost \$12,000 in the last 10 months.

"Synanon has been a blessing to this community," Mr. Brancato said, "and we're doing what we can to support them in their work."

The narcotics problem still exists in Pelham Bay, Father D'Argenio said yesterday, "But it is much smaller here today than before."

Father D'Argenio, who grew up in East Harlem, said his greatest problem was convincing teen-agers that taking narcotics was not "a funny kick" that they could turn on and off.

"I tell them they can become the 'victims of the big joke,'" the priest said.