

Bobby Faces His Peers in Marathon Rap Session

(Editors: When a Congressional committee came to Florida this year to study drug abuse, it found not only evidence that 50 per cent of teenagers may be on drugs but also a promising and unorthodox new program to combat drug abuse called "The Seed." Reporter Frank Eidge went to study The Seed and why it works and the former nightclub comedian who founded it. The following is the second of a three-part series.)

By FRANK EIDGE
FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (UPI)—It's a brutal, marathon "rap" session.

Brutal for 15-year-old Bobby, standing in the hot sun behind an abandoned plastics factory with 50 other kids seated on the

Second in a Series

concrete apron around him. They are blurs in his sight. His gut and mind are crawling for a puff of grass, a downer, an upper, a shot of smack—anything. And all these kids throwing it at him.

"Nobody cares a s— about you out there, Bobby!" a boy his own age shouts at him. "What's so cool out there? When are you going to start growing up, little boy?"

A girl on Bobby's other side gets up and screams right at him: "You afraid of the good life, Bobby? You afraid of making something of yourself? Look at me—I was like you. I got up off my a— and did something."

Peer Pressure

It's Bobby's day to face himself and his peers. He can't cop out. He can't con them. All of them have been this route before him. They call it peer pressure.

Suddenly, Bobby's face softens. Tears run down his cheeks. He stammers how he is a failure, how nobody really loves him, how he hates himself.

"You wanna be loved, Bobby?" the first boy asks, but now the harsh tone is gone. The harsh four-letter words are gone. "I love you, Bobby. Everybody here loves you."

The kids shout in chorus: "Love ya, Bobby!"

This is "The Seed" in action. When they use the word "love", they mean it. And that may be the subtle difference between The Seed and other forms of group therapy, many of which tend to rob the individual of dignity.

Love is the byword of The Seed, exchanged eye-to-eye between the kids, founder Art Barker, the 47-year-old former nightclub comedian who founded the program and The Seed's one "professional", Sister Teresa Margaret.

Sister Teresa, assigned to The Seed by the Archdiocese of Miami, speaks with a Florida Cracker twang but holds degrees in sociology and psychology.

A tall and handsome black boy has experienced his "three-day miracle" a month ago and stands for his turn at rap.

"I just feel the love all around me," he says. "I want to keep it inside me. It is the greatest thing in this world today. People trying to go to the moon, but it's here."

"Sentenced" to Seed

Now they come to the old factory on the edge of the Everglades at the rate of 15 a day. The average age is 15. Two years ago it was 20.

They are "sentenced" to The Seed by the courts, parents and school deans. A few turn themselves in for they have learned on their own what the program teaches: "You have three alternatives to going straight—prison, insanity or death."

A new member goes through two weeks of "peer pressure" in a saturation program of daily sessions from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Boys and girls attend separate sessions during the day where individual problems are discussed and solutions suggested.

In the evenings, all members attend general sessions where staff members take turns leading discussion. "Open"

In 1814, the British captured Washington, D.C., burning the Capitol Building and the Executive Mansion.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to make a transcontinental non-stop flight.

sessions are held twice a week with parents, friends, teachers, probation and parole officers joining in. A typical open meeting may include 120 members and 400 visitors.

In the two weeks of intense 12-hour-a-day rap sessions, the child lives at a foster home and

is not permitted to see or speak to his parents. Then comes the twice-a-week "family nights."

Unite Families

The parents sit three hours in hard folding chairs to face their children across an open aisle. In turn, they exchange news and tears.

"We unite a family," Barker told the House Select Committee on Crime and Drug Abuse at a Miami hearing this year where a criminal court judge called his program "a miracle."

If the member has not made

adequate progress in two weeks, he continues the intensive sessions for two more weeks. If he has shown an improved attitude, he goes back to school, or job and returns home, attending group sessions for three hours each night and all day Saturday.

After three months, the member is considered "straight" but continues to attend sessions once or twice a week.

The 10 to 10 sessions are extended as needed for difficult cases.

The cost per child for the three and a half months is about \$100 and parents are asked to make a \$100 donation. Many give more.

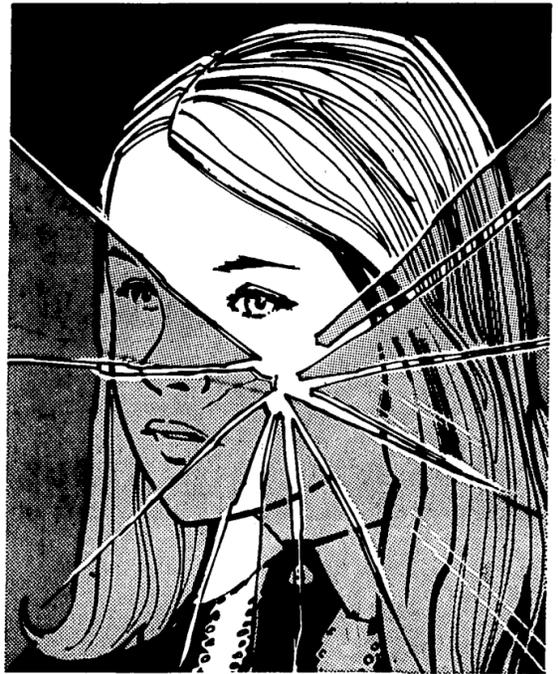
A federal grant of \$177,200 a year, matching funds, other grants and donations have

funded the operation by upward of \$300,000. This provides about \$110,000 for a staff of 26 and payments toward the new quarters in the former plastics factory.

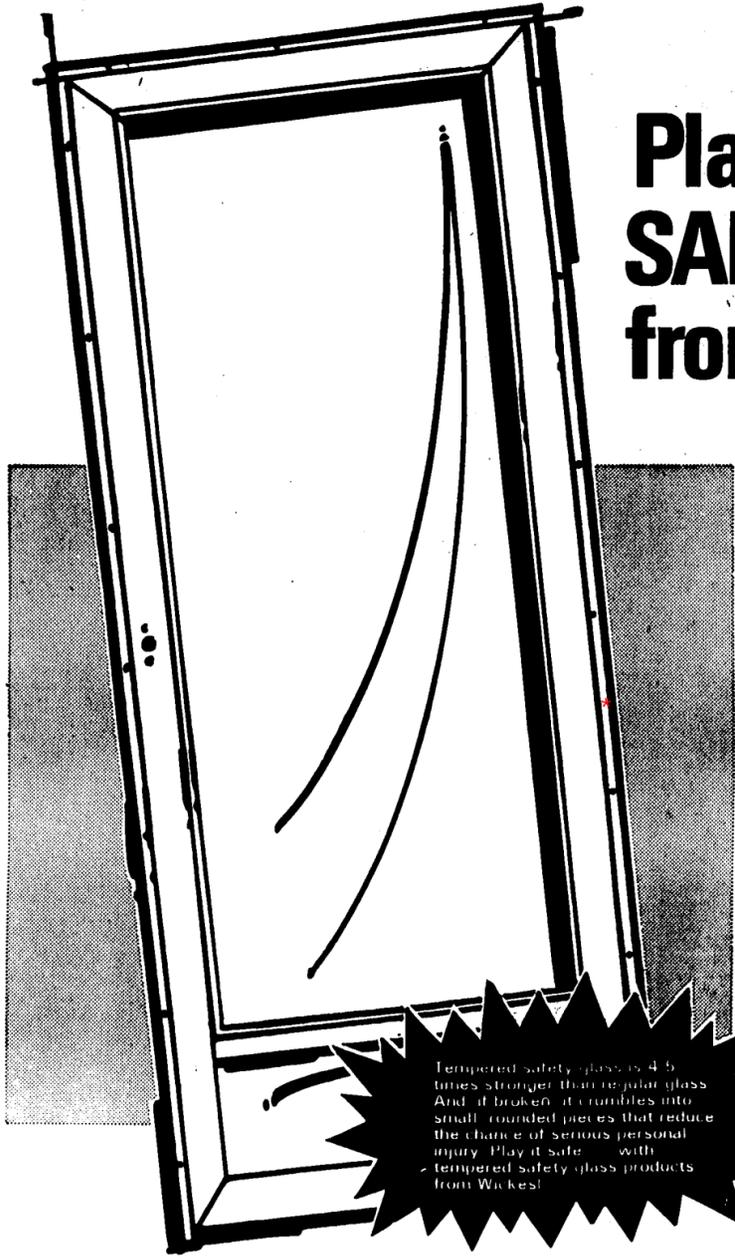
(Next: Art Barker, founder of The Seed.)

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