IT WAS JUST ANOTHER TYPICAL PICNIC — WELL, ALMOST. SEE CENTERFOLD.

The Drug Problem...
What You CAN Do

By JOHN R. SULLIVAN
NC News Service

The place was the auditorium of a suburban public high school and the people were normal middle-class American citizens of various religious persuasions.

The mayor, a Protestant, chaired the meeting. The council members—Jews, Catholics and Protestants—sat to one side of the stage. The invited guests sat on the other.

An ecumenical religious meeting? No, rather a public discussion of ways and means to deal with what most citizens agree is a major problem: drugs.

It was ironic, and sad: we have come to accept as fact the assertion that drugs are nearly miraculous—penicillin can put a pneumonia victim on his feet in days; it used to take months —and now we were looking for a near miracle to cure us of their bad effects.

We accept the television announcer's advice: if you can't sleep, take Brand X, if you can't stay awake, take Brand Y, if your head hurts, take compounds A through M.

But we have found that the miracle of modern chemistry cannot only cure us: it can kill us. "Speed Kills" is no longer an auto safety slogan, but a fact of adolescent life; the amphetimine that mother takes to help her diet can cause her child to drop out of school, hit the street, and—more often than we care to admit—die.

It seems to happen so quickly. How often have we heard this: "My son started the school year so well, but by Christmas he had lost interest. We tried to talk him out of it, but he dropped out at Easter."

It happens quickly—nice kids turn sour and sullen—so we want to reverse the process just as quickly.

So the mayor stood in front of the voters and asked them and the invited experts to advise his city on the best program to deal with the problem.

The alternatives were many: expansion of hospital facilities to wean addicts from their habits; methadone; a halfway house; a larger staff of probation officers; more school counselors.

The problem was quickly apparent: panic had set in, and with it, a loss of reality. The mayor, the councilmen, the citizens were seeking THE answer.

What one program, they asked, will save us from this menace?

The discouraging, hard answer also materialized: there is not one answer, or one program, but many. Hospitals help some, fail others; halfway houses help some, not others; counseling at school stops some from getting into the drug scene, utterly fails with others; the force of law scares many, makes others defiant.

It was equally clear, however, that the problem is not insurmountable; its just complicated. For the fact is emerging that people take drugs for many dif-ferent reasons (and some for no apparent reason). And they stop for many reasons.

The trick—and it is one that can be turned with hard work, not miraculous intervention — is to provide enough of as many kinds of services as possible. And to focus on the places where the potential for trouble is greatest, whether it is in the high school, junior high, a neighborhood hangout — or in the medicine cabinet at home.

These aren't assertions drawn out of thin air. They come from two very useful publications that can be obtained cheaply and which, if heeded, can lower your anxiety and raise your effectiveness in dealing with the problem of drug use — whether at home or in the community.

So we'll end with a plug for them both:

— "Common Sense Lives Here," a community guide to drug abuse action. Available from the National Coordinating Council on Drug Abuse Education and Information, Inc., Suite 212, 1211 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington 20036.

—"Drugs and the Young," published by the Time Education Program, Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, N.Y., N.Y., 10020.

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