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Different approach helps addicts change behavior

By Val Prevish • Enquirer contributor • April 12, 2009

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NORTHSIDE - After many years of working with addiction treatment centers around Greater Cincinnati, Donna Butler, a chemical dependency counselor, believed she could offer a better method and create a successful business at the same time.

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She founded New Direction Treatment Services downtown in 2004. It has since moved to Northside, where she treats roughly 50 clients per week with outpatient group therapy.

Butler said that she wanted to offer clients "a softer, gentler" approach to treatment than she had witnessed at many other centers.

"I had been a director at other treatment centers," said Butler. "I saw some things that work and others that don't work. Some centers get caught up in practices that don't put the client first."

Often, addiction treatment is a court-ordered process, said Butler, and many individuals must complete therapy in order to regain control of some portion of their lives, such as a job, custody of children or a driver's license.

Because treatment is not always the choice of these individuals, there are extra challenges in creating a program to help them achieve the desired goals.

Butler created New Direction as a private-pay operation, meaning that she does not accept insurance.

Taking insurance companies out of the picture means that she must create an atmosphere where clients want to come in for treatment, she said.

"With the client paying the bill, they are our only customer," she said, adding that this fact creates a much different mind-set than exists at many publicly funded or insurance funded treatment centers.

"We treat them with the highest regard as a customer," she said. "We are very happy and enthusiastically providing for them."

To keep the treatment affordable, Butler said she offers rates of roughly \$30 an hour. Several full and partial scholarships are available. Before clients can "graduate" and get their certificates of completion, Butler said she requires that they pay any outstanding balances.

Her efforts have resulted in profits, and she said growth in her business should increase her revenue in 2009 to \$70,000 from \$46,000 in 2008.

Albert "Al" White of Montgomery, who completed a treatment program at New Direction in the fall on a partial scholarship, said his therapy there made a big impact on redirecting his behavior in a way that previous programs had not.

"I had been through several treatment centers before New Direction and I quit drinking for a while, but I always relapsed," said White, who has had several DUI convictions. One resulted in his referral to New Direction.

"At first I thought it was just another program," he said. "But then I got the feeling they cared more, a lot more. Other programs were large, 30 or 40 people. There was no one-on-one. One counselor with so many people made it hard for them to make it seem personal."



About New Direction Treatment Services

Address: 1612 Chase Ave., Northside

Phone: 513-541-7111

Web site: www.newdirectiontreatment.com

Employees: Four

Owner: Donna Butler

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White said he often felt frustrated with other programs where doors would be locked if he was late, and missing more than two sessions would result in expulsion.

New Direction didn't take such a hard-line approach, he said, and their willingness to work with his schedule made him more likely to attend.

White said he is now taking online classes to prepare for a new job and has not relapsed into his old habits. He has also started volunteering at New Direction and would like to become an addiction counselor.

Butler said she gauges her clients' success by the progress they make in group therapy. Stories such as White's have helped to increase her client base as word of mouth has spread about her program.

"We want them to have a choice in what they get out of this," she said. "They are able to control what they are in agreement with."

In addition to therapy sessions, Butler offers her clients holistic healing approaches such as reflexology, nutrition and exercise advice and herbal teas to encourage healthy habits. She also offers family counseling, family intervention and anger management counseling.

"We want to open up their minds to new ways of looking at things," she said.

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