Support group replaces alcohol

By CARL REDMAN
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It was a rainy afternoon, but the door to Delta Haven was wide open.

A couple of painters were trimming the doors in one room, and a handful of teenagers joked and laughed in the other.

"All right, who wants to be first?"

They were there to talk about alcohol, themselves and Delta Haven, a joint effort of BREC and ADAPP.

They were a little shy at first, but once they started, they talked almost non-stop.

"For nearly two hours, drifting in and out singly and in pairs, nearly a dozen teenagers talked about Baton Rouge and booze."

"I came here as an alcoholic for the AA meetings. But Delta Haven is a neat place," said 16-year-old Traci. "Everybody is close to my age."

"At one time I couldn't afford to be around people who used at all. I was here seven days a week. It's a safe place where you can have fun without alcohol being there."

It was Traci who brought Missy to Delta Haven. Missy who had tried to quit with her sister but didn't make it.

Missy is 16 and convinced she's an alcoholic.

"She never spent any of her own money on dope or booze — that was her boyfriend's responsibility — but, she said, she used plenty, abused plenty.

And when her friend Traci got straight, Missy decided it was time for her to do it too.

Today, Missy is a lot happier with herself and her life. She grins a little sheepishly when she remembers the way it used to be. The 10 p.m. curfews. The way her mother checked her eyes and smelled her breath when she got home.

There's a bond between the kids at Delta Haven, a strong bond that is the reverse of the alcohol bond they once shared with other friends in other places.

And being straight brings some mixed reactions from old friends who are still using.

"My best friend when I was using, we still see each other," said 16-year-old Jay. "He still offers me stuff, but when I turn him down, he just says, 'It's all right. That just leaves more for me.'"

"On the surface, my old friends would say it's great, you're doing real good," Paul said. "But below that, it scares them."

Sixteen-year-old Jay said almost every teen-ager at Delta Haven thought of them as the only ones that had made it.

"I had a friend of Broussard on a Care program," Traci said. "The principals really into the I Care program. If Missy or I have a problem, we can get out of class any time to talk to the counselors."

At Catholic High, the teachers are very aware of the problem and watch the students very closely, Jay said.

"There's a lot of support at Woodlawn," Traci said. "The principal is really into the I Care program. If Missy or I have a problem, we can get out of class any time to talk to the counselors."

"There have been a lot of changes since I went through treatment (in 1980)," Paul said. "I have seen a change in awareness. A lot more teachers are recognizing it as a problem and are willing to take steps to do things. Now every high school has some form of support group or another."

Delta Haven is a sign of the growing concern. Open less than two years, Delta Haven is sort of a club — at least that's how some of the teen-agers think of it. And, Paul said, the only requirement for membership is that the teen-ager wants to be straight and drug-free while at Delta Haven functions.