

January 17, 2009

[This is the print preview: Back to normal view »](#)



[Maia Szalavitz](#)

Posted January 16, 2009 | 01:16 PM (EST)

DEA, Florida 'Honor' Abusive Rehab Founder, ** **Republican Financier

Read More: [Addiction](#), [Bush](#), [Drugs](#), [Rehab](#), [Republicans](#), [Sembler](#), [Straight Inc](#), [Treatment](#), [Living News](#)



Imagine if Wall Street were to honor Bernie Madoff for his skills as an investor ten years from now. The equivalent just Sembler--co-founder of the abusive Straight, Inc. rehab chain--has been named by Governor Charlie Crist to its "Wom drugs. Last year, the DEA gave her a lifetime achievement award.

You may know Betty Sembler as wife of mall magnate [Mel Sembler](#) (another co-founder of Straight). He's the guy who Fund, chaired finances for the Republicans during the first election of the second Bush, and served as ambassador to the embassy for himself, in the process.

Straight--which at its peak had centers in seven states and claims to have treated 50,000 teens--has long been discrete harmful. Its policy of using confrontation, humiliation and physical punishment led to dozens of lawsuits, with plaintiffs for kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment and emotional abuse.

Some of the more notorious cases involved kids being gagged with Kotex, being restrained by fellow students until the frequent use of sexually degrading and homophobic slurs. Many survivors have since been diagnosed with PTSD; the

[Research](#) conducted on confrontation has found that the more it is used, the more likely patients are to drink or take d

"With all the available evidence-based treatments with proven effects, it's hard to understand a desire to support thing; addiction expert Tom McLellan, PhD, who is CEO of the Treatment Research Institute and a professor of psychology i Pennsylvania.

Regarding Straight's tactics, McLellan says, "They're counterproductive. It's hard to even conceive of a therapeutic rel; and frankly, meanness."

Says William Miller, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of New Mexico and one of the leading experts "Obviously this recognition was not founded on evidence-based effectiveness in helping troubled teens."

If Straight was simply a historical relic, the refusal to accept its tarnished place in the history of addiction treatment mig based on Straight like the [Pathway Family Center](#) in Detroit and [AARC](#) in Canada are still operating. While the worst p in some places, the emotional abuse of being constantly forced to focus on your flaws and bad behavior, remains.

And most teens who have been through these programs say that the psychological abuse is the worst part. Imagine being who needs to "surrender" and "admit powerlessness" and "character defects." Consider what it feels like to be told what you are lying, that you must have done more than that, that you are not telling the whole story. If you admit excess: identified as an addict-- if you don't, you are bullied for being a liar.

Meanwhile, imagine having every aspect of your daily life under a microscope, with no privacy, even at night or in the car, picked over by other teenagers whose only chance of going home and getting free is to pick up on your weaknesses as you "work the program." And you have to attack others, too, if you want to "advance."

Consider, too, that your sex life is included in this examination--and that any desire for anyone else will be attacked as abnormal and human. Any relationships that you have had in the past will be tarred as "druggy"-- and you will be told that anything that happened while you were "using" was about drugs and nothing more.

If you confess to being a virgin, you'll be ridiculed for that--but if you admit sexual activity, you'll be reviled as a slut. As you advance, you'll be blamed for leading them on!

I wish I was making this stuff up--but unfortunately, I've personally listened to and read hundreds of accounts of similar programs and their descendants. And sadly, it's not limited to them: other "troubled teen" programs like the Family Foundation Specialty Programs and Schools and the Elan School are similarly based on "breaking" teenagers to fix them.

Honoring anyone involved with this kind of treatment who still fails to recognize its harms is a dishonor to us all.

SEARCH

- [Copyright © 2009 HuffingtonPost.com, Inc.](#) |
- [Archive](#) |
- [User Agreement](#) |
- [Privacy](#) |
- [Comment Policy](#) |
- [About Us](#) |
- [Powered by Movable Type](#)

