

Turning Point Hosts National Drug Treatment Press Conference

BY DAN SALERNO

of the Verona-Cedar Grove Times

The young woman had to fight to control her tears as she addressed the audience.

"When I first came to Turning Point I wasn't too sure of myself," she said, struggling to hold her composure. "This program taught me a lot. I'm just so happy that I'm here. It took me eight years, and I just thank God and everyone else for what has been done for me."

The woman is a client at Turning Point, one of its most recent success stories in the making, and one of a host of hopefully happy endings that the Cedar Grove-based alcohol and drug rehabilitation center has helped to facilitate over the years. Last week, the fa-

cility enjoyed one of its proudest moments and some of its most gratifying recognition when it hosted a national press conference to announce a new White House initiative to boost drug rehabilitation treatment.

Andrea Barthwell, deputy director for demand reduction at the Office of National Drug Control policy, was joined at the conference by Turning Point Director Manuel Guantez, David Heins of the New Jersey Department of Human Services and Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo, all of whom stressed the importance of drug rehabilitation services. They also praised Turning Point, which has been recognized by President Bush as a "model program" for its success

over the years.

"Turning Point is one of those quiet gems that works with Essex County to help provide for people in need," said DiVincenzo. "It's a great example of the importance of having programs that help our most vulnerable families."

Guantez said that Turning Point's ability to successfully treat patients is due to staff members who are always willing to go the extra mile to help a client.

"They continue to astound me," said Guantez of the Turning Point staff. "These truly are individuals who go above and beyond even their own expectations."

Barthwell, who worked with Bush on forming the new initiative, said that Washington was "very impressed with the work"

of the Turning Point staff.

"It's a remarkable product that you have here," said Barthwell. "It's not just bricks and mortar."

According to Barthwell, the president's new \$600 million plan, known as the Access to Recovery Initiative, will work by allowing individuals in need to receive vouchers from the federal government to offset the costs of recovery treatment. The federal dollars would be usable at any effective treatment organization. States would be responsible for monitoring the outcomes of the voucher program and for making adjustments to treatment strategies.

"This initiative presents new and effective means for the federal government to help people get into recovery," said Barthwell.

"Treatment works, but we know that three-fourths of the people who need treatment don't even recognize that they need treatment, and too many Americans cannot access treatment for a variety of reasons."

Barthwell said that offering patients a treatment that matches their individual needs will help the overall success of drug treatment programs. The new initiative will also help by increasing accountability, according to Barthwell.

Carolann Kane-Cavaiola of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services said the initiative is a step in the right direction. "This is a quality initiative in that it focuses on point of care," she said. "We're looking forward

to this."

Turning Point has been in existence since 1975, when the original 10-bed residential treatment facility for alcoholics was opened. Today, Turning Point has 126 beds and is one of the largest providers of short-term residential substance abuse treatment in the state of New Jersey. While Turning Point is currently leasing space from the county at the Essex County Hospital Center, they will have to find a new space when the hospital center is torn down to make way for developers, which will happen sometime in the next several months, according to a county timeline.

"We have to work on finding a new home for Turning Point," said DiVincenzo.