

CRITICS say cult behind drug-rehab program

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Kids working for Scientology front? AUG 7/91

Dozens of Winnipeg teenagers have been hired to raise funds for a drug rehabilitation program which critics charge is nothing more than a recruiting front for a "mind-control cult."

About 60 teenagers who answered newspaper advertisements for summer jobs are selling pepperoni and T-shirts door-to-door to raise money for Narconon — a drug rehab organization linked to the Church of Scientology.

And while officials from the program and the man behind the drive say it's all above board, it has sparked concern that the church — which has been alleged to



RUTNER: Dangerous

former Scientology members as patients.

Rutner said it's not unusual for cult-like organizations to attract recruits through a

socially acceptable pretext and then expose them to the organization's doctrine. And an Oklahoma newspaper publisher who has been battling the Church of Scientology for two years said he has no doubt it's a cult — and Narconon is used to attract new members.

"(Narconon's) just strictly a recruiting front for the Church of Scientology," said Newkirk Herald Journal publisher Bob Lobsinger, who says he has been harassed by the church for opposing its plan to set up a Narconon operation in the state.

"It's a paramilitary, mind-control cult."

'Frightening'

A Winnipeg woman who has seen media reports about the church and was approached by a teen salesperson last week said it's "frightening" Narconon is raising money here and taking donations that would otherwise go to legitimate Winnipeg charities.

The woman, who asked that her name be withheld because she fears harassment, said she might have made a donation if she hadn't seen a recent television documentary linking Narconon to Scientology.

As well, a recent cover story in Time magazine alleged that the church — founded by writer L. Ron Hubbard and based on his book Dianetics — is a ruthless, corrupt organization whose members are abused and bilked of their savings.

A Church of Scientology member in Toronto verified Narconon is "related" to Scientology, and that the church supplies all Narconon's books, videos and materials.

Good intentions

However, both a Narconon spokesman and Brian Knowles, manager of Wellington Food Service, which operates the fund-raising effort, said Narconon is a separate entity from the church, and has nothing but good intentions.

Knowles said Wellington — which also provides food products for fund-raising efforts for schools, clubs and charities — hired students to sell for Narconon because he believes the program helps people get off drugs.

And he's using the opportunity to have occasional "briefings" with the teens about the "drug situation," and show them Narconon videos, the first of which is a promotional video, he said.

Narconon has several U.S. centres, but only two in Canada: in Toronto and Vancouver. Knowles said the organization is considering opening a centre in Winnipeg, and added he wouldn't be alarmed to learn the drug program is an arm of Scientology.

However, Lynne McKague, spokesperson for Narconon in Toronto, hotly denied

THE WINNIPEG SUN

(Photo by Pat Germain)
Church of Scientology headquarters on second floor of 388 Donald.

the program is involved in recruiting Scientology members, and suggested she should send the local woman promotional material to allay her fears.

Plans for a Winnipeg centre are in the "embryonic" stage, and won't necessarily bear fruit, she said.