



Program helps children of alcoholics break the cycle

By **Tenley Woodman**

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Teenagers aren't the only ones who abuse alcohol.

In fact, many teens feel its effects without ever taking a sip. Beginning next month, the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps will launch the Children of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse program at the Charlestown Boys & Girls Club.

Of the 142,000 children in Boston, at least 36,000 of them are children of alcoholics, said Maureen McGlame, the program's creator and director. Children of alcoholics are at higher risk for teen pregnancy, learning problems, suicide, addiction, dropping out of school and juvenile delinquency. The program teaches teens how to cope with their family member's addiction, and provide them with a safe place to share their experiences.

Step one of the program is to learn about the disease.

``It's not their father, it's the illness the father has. They (children of alcoholics) can have recovery. . . . Children can recover whether or not their parents can," McGlame said.

``Kids are going to be learning new skills. If a child came home and found his mother passed out on the kitchen floor, it's not right to put a blanket on them and put them to bed. They need to call an ambulance. This person is sick."

McGlame has worked in the substance abuse field for more than 30 years. She modeled COASA after the Children's Program at the Betty Ford Clinic in Palm Springs, Calif., and the Maplegrove Children's Program in Maplegrove, Mich.

Parental consent is required to participate in McGlame's program.

``Kids who grow up in alcoholic families live according to certain basic rules: Don't talk, don't trust and don't feel," McGlame said. ``And they also live with certain beliefs: They caused it, the kids themselves can control it and can cure it."

COASA hopes to break the cycle of fear and shame by offering support groups.

McGlame said it is important that kids realize their addicted family member is not the only one who needs help.

``It's a family disease. The alcoholic is not the only person who is sick. Spouses and family members become codependent," she said.

(To learn more about the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corp's Children of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse program, call 617-227-4183 or go to www.rfkchildren.org)