

Survey: Drug Store Project makes a difference with kids

By Kathryn Reed

"I am concerned about kids my age (12) to be taking drugs and that they can cause death, lung problems, liver problems, and to make you look older than you are."

That is what a sixth-grader on the South Shore said after attending the Drug Store Project this spring.

While plenty of people believe drug and alcohol education should be the responsibility of parents, the reality is that is not happening.



Students learn about gateway drugs in the Drug Store Project. Photo/LTN file

More than half the students at South Tahoe Middle, Zephyr Cove and St. Theresa schools said they get most of their information about drugs at school. About 20 percent get the info from their parents, while the next largest "educator" is TV, movies and books.

"The comments for me are the most important. You can tell from those they are not getting drug prevention in the schools,"

Lisa Huard, who puts on the Drug Store project each year, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "They should know what gateway drugs are. They should know them by name. They should have that before they ever get to sixth grade."

Huard was the safety coordinator for Lake Tahoe Unified School District until the position was eliminated a handful of years ago. She continues to do that work on a contract basis for Tahoe Truckee Unified.

Tahoe Youth & Family Services is now the lead agency for Drug Store Project.

These are the LTUSD drug and alcohol curriculum guidelines provided by the district. Superintendent Jim Tarwater was not available to talk about what is actually being taught in the classroom now that the emphasis is on ensuring students test well to meet state and federal requirements.

However, South Tahoe Middle School Principal Beth Delacour said, "What Lisa (Huard) does is amazing. It changes kids lives and it makes them think. I think Drug Store Project is really valuable. It gives them a glimpse of reality and helps them think."

"One thing I learned was that one minute you're trying to be cool, the next minute your parents are called to come to the hospital and the doctors have to tell your parent 'we're sorry, but your child's gone' and then your parents don't know what to do. So my point is don't do drugs. Never ever. One try could kill you." – South Shore sixth-grader

The daylong event talks about how tobacco, alcohol and marijuana can lead to the use of stronger, more dangerous drugs. But it also talks about the danger of these three drugs are.

"The concern I have in the last two years has been the increase of kids with the acceptability of pot and saying it

is not a bad thing,” Huard said. “People don’t want to see our kids drinking, but they don’t seem to be alarmed with marijuana because they smoke it.”

At an age when children are not mature enough to fully understand the consequences of their actions, they are getting conflicting information about what is OK to put in their bodies. They want to emulate the adults in their lives. They may see the marijuana shops dispensing medicinal marijuana, so youngsters see pot solely as a legal drug.

On the student survey one of the biggest differences in pre- and post-event answers was with the response to: Prescription drugs from someone’s doctor are safe to take. Almost half thought this was true before Drug Store Project, while more than three-quarters knew afterward that taking drugs prescribed for someone else could be lethal.

“I learned that most likely seven people in my class will be addicted to drugs by the time they graduate from high school.” – South Shore sixth-grader

Huard said, “It all centers around destructive behavior. They need to know what it does to their body. They need to be provided the opportunity to make better decisions. The majority of our kids, who if they knew more, they would make different choices.”