

Letter: Drug Store Project makes a difference

To the community,

Thank you to the many agencies, service clubs, public organizations, and volunteers who helped with the 12th annual Drug Store Project event on March 31 at Lake Tahoe Community College. Our 320 sixth-grade students had the assistance of 200 volunteers to send a clear message that they are valued. Teaching our youth about the dangers of all drugs; marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, over-the-counter as well as prescriptive medications, gets more challenging each year as states provide new legislation and products such as e-cigarettes that are packaged to entice our minors.

The agencies and groups who provided this program strongly believe that a difference can be made for our kids. Collectively we believe that if youth are provided knowledge about what effects drugs have on the body, the mind, family and social life, productivity, and overall positive life experiences, that many more will choose not to experiment and not to participate in drug use. If we can collectively put off the “age of onset” experimentation, then we can see a difference for our youth. Less drug use means less demand. Less demand is less costly in lives and in all facets of economics.

This year marked the 12th year of our program and we continue to make improvements and adjust with the needs of our youth each year. Our students complete both a pre and post survey to evaluate the information we provide. We want to know if it is making a difference on a cognitive level; if they are gaining knowledge about what drugs are and what consequences can occur. We also work to learn what they thought about our program. Additionally, a counselor from Tahoe Youth & Family

Services will visit each classroom following the event for further discussion and students will be provided a community bag to take home.

Already our youth are reporting that the event was both meaningful and worth their time; that they have more information and confidence to make decisions that are in their best interest. Youth are reminded that the true test will come when confronted to choose experimentation or use of drugs, as the choice will be theirs alone. "Choices, What are Yours?" is the message we provide our youth before, during, and after this event.

Of the 200 individuals working the event, 16 were students at South Tahoe High School who participated in the program while in sixth grade. We also had the assistance of four Honor Society students from Lake Tahoe Community College assisting us. Those 20 students are now a proactive part in drug prevention here in Lake Tahoe and we couldn't be more proud. We continue to also have the assistance of our California National Guard with representatives from our Army and Air Force who are assigned to the Joint Task Force Domestic Support – Counter Drug. It is with the help of these men and women who are working on coalitions to help provide events such as these for our communities. Their contributions are invaluable.

Tahoe Youth & Family Services is the agency under which our program is based. The Drug Store Project continues to be supported completely through donations, grants, and in-kind donations from businesses amounting to \$41,650. Of this amount, \$24,360 of in-kind donations is provided by Harrah's Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel, McFarlane Mortuary, and Lake Tahoe Community College. The needed "cash" for this program is donated by our service clubs and agencies, \$11,000 this year. We are in year two of the South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition's grant and receive \$4,200 and we maintain a small carryover from year-to-year to keep us going when donations

are less. The true cost per pupil attending this year is approximately \$130. Every dollar is worth a child's life. Please support those that support your kids.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to the following entities:

Barton Health, Barton Health Foundation, California Conservation Corps, California Highway Patrol, CalSTAR, Diamond Valley School, Douglas County Search and Rescue, El Dorado Community Foundation, El Dorado County District Attorney, El Dorado County Mental Health, El Dorado County Probation, El Dorado County Public Health, El Dorado County Search and Rescue-Tahoe Team, El Dorado County Sheriff's Office – Narcotics, EDSO Sherriff's Team of Active Retirees, El Dorado County Superior Court, Harrah's Harvey's Lake Tahoe, Harrah's HEROS Program, JCV Photography, Joint Task Force Domestic Support-CD, Kiwanis Club of Lake Tahoe, Kiwanis Club of Tahoe Sierra, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Lake Valley Fire Protection District, McFarlane Mortuary, Optimist Club of Lake Tahoe, Partnership of Community Resources, Pro Leisure, Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe, Sierra Community Church, Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, South Lake Tahoe Police Department: Explorers/K9/Narcotics/Patrol, South Lake Tahoe Police Officer's Association, South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition, South Tahoe High School, Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District, Tahoe-Douglas Rotary Club, Tahoe Turning Point, Tahoe Youth & Family Services, Zephyr Cove Elementary, and the many community volunteers.

I hope that every parent of a sixth-grade youth will take the time to complete the parent survey on the Drug Store Project event. We hope that you and your child openly discuss the dangers of all drugs on a regular basis.

Get educated together.

Gratefully,

Lisa Huard, Drug Store Project coordinator